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ADÈLE.

A TALE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

"NATHALIE," "RACHEL GRAY,"

&c. &c.

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways.
.
A maid, whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."—WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ADÈLE.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT AILED ADÈLE.

Mr. Osborne and his future partner had been out together the whole day, and together they rode home in the grey of evening and the faint light of an early moon. They had been silent long, but as the pale and indistinct front of the Manor rose before them, the Baron found his tongue.

"I am very much annoyed with this new delay," said Monsieur de Launay.

"It is tiresome," said Mr. Osborne, quietly.

"Tiresome!" echoed Monsieur de Launay, with the tone of an indignant lover, "why, it puts off my marriage full three months; for it will take three months at least to settle that matter in America, and get the papers."

"Three! four, you mean."

Slowly and pensively Monsieur de Launay rode on; then suddenly reining in his horse, he exclaimed, like one struck with a sudden thought—

"But why not have the marriage first, and the partnership afterwards? it would come to the same thing, you know."

He spoke so naturally. Who would not have thought that he meant what he said? Who could think that the offer was made as a courteous acknowledgment of the charms of Isabella which her brother could not in honour accept, and must, indeed, in common honesty, decline? A bitter smile curled Mr. Osborne's handsome Grecian lip. "Mock love, mock honour, mock courtesy!" he thought, "counterfeits that pass for current all the world over, could ye not leave in peace, were ye bound to desecrate the beauty and the stillness of this heavenly night?" And as his sad look wandered over the veiled landscape, above which spread the sky, where faint stars lay scattered, he remembered that wonderful *Night* of Michael Angelo, that weary woman who bows her head and closes her eyes, not so much to sleep as to forget a world of sin and falsehood, a life of shame and lies.

His long silence surprised and alarmed Monsieur de Launay. Was it possible that Mr. Osborne knew so little of life, of the world, of business, as to take him at his word? But unwilling to retract, and confident, moreover, of Madame de Launay's power to extract him from any predicament, he was going to insist, with an increase of lover-like warmth, on the necessity of immediate union, when, to his great relief, Mr. Osborne quietly said—

"I am very much obliged to you for so disinterested an offer, but it is impossible for me to accept

it. Three or four months' delay," he added, with perceptible irony, "will not lessen your married bliss."

Monsieur de Launay laughed.

"It is very well for you to speak so," he said—"did you wait or leave to time what happiness the present offered."

"Ay, truly," ruefully thought Mr. Osborne, "mine is a happy lot, and I have good reason to remember my hurry."

They were within a few yards of the Manor; the drawing-room windows were open; the sound of voices came forth on the evening air; a white dress appeared on the central balcony; Mr. Osborne recognised his sister; Monsieur de Launay his mistress. He took off his hat, and bowed low; she waved her handkerchief, and the Baron's handsome bay horse began to prance and display the perfect horsemanship of his rider to those fair eyes. Joli was more quiet, or perhaps he knew with equine sagacity that his master had no eyes to charm: he remained very still, whilst with a smile half stern, half scornful, Mr. Osborne looked on at the Baron's curvetting, and listened to Isabella's little screams of terror. "Ay, play at love, both of you," he thought; "better after all the woe-begone looks of my little Adèle than this hollow sham."

But everything must end with time; trite truth which the Baron's prancing verified. It ceased; and Tom, the Baron's English groom, who had kept at a respectful distance, now rode up, and took charge of his master's lively horse.

"How late you are!" said Mrs. Osborne, turning round as the two gentlemen entered the drawing-room.

"We dined at Nantua," said Mr. Osborne, vainly looking round the room for his wife.

Madame de Launay was playing at chess with Mrs. Osborne; a strange contrast between that little dry, nut-like woman with the keen eye, and that graceful, handsome lady with the serene aspect. She looked inquiringly at her nephew.

"It is a most melancholy fatality," he said, in a tone of feeling concern; "we must actually send to America for those machines."

Madame de Launay took off her spectacles and put them on again.

"Well," she said, coolly, "it is only a little delay, you know."

She returned to her game, whilst Mrs. Osborne, less self-possessed, bit her lip, and lost her move.

"Well?" said Isabella, going up to her brother with assumed carelessness.

"Madame Talleyrand," he replied, looking over at the two chess players, "is too clever for me. This new delay, her work from beginning to end, will make us linger on through the whole summer."

The eye of Isabella flashed, her lip trembled.

"He is a wretch," she said, in a low, indignant tone.

"He is a commercial man, and he has an aunt," said Mr. Osborne, quietly. "If he were free, I do believe he would marry you to-morrow. Smooth your brow, all is not over yet."

And leaving her with this piece of comfort to the Baron, whom he saw advancing, he crossed the room, and went and sat by Alice.

"Where is Adèle?" he asked.

"She went up to Anna's room a little while ago," replied Madame Lascours, not willing to say that it was when she heard her husband returning that Adèle had left the apartment. But he guessed it, and he smiled with some bitterness.

Since her birthday, a week before, Adèle had assumed a haughty, though perfectly civil, coolness, which Mr. Osborne had found anything but pleasant. Surprised and sorry, he had tried to dispel it by kindness; and he had failed so completely, he had been so coldly repelled, so frigidly assured that his wife was well in spirits and in health, that he had not felt tempted to renew such unwelcome efforts. Still less—though he had not seen her since the morning—did he now feel tempted to intrude on the retirement which she sought. If she shunned his presence, why she might. Accordingly he remained by Madame Lascours, talking to her, unconscious that for the last ten minutes his wife was sitting opposite him, looking at him and Alice with strange earnestness.

Alas! a feeling had come over her which would quicken the dead. In vain she worked; her needle moved, but her eyes saw it not. In vain she took up a book; it dropped on her lap. In vain the Baron, rather dismayed at the snappish replies his fair lady gave him, came and sat by her, and devoted his amiability to the mistress of the house. Adèle

smiled and answered, and looked at him; but the effort was like that of dividing her soul from her body. At length her pride revolted against this; she forbade her thoughts and her looks to wander beyond a certain circle—"That you shall not pass," she said to them; and turning to the Baron, she gave him her full attention.

We are all like the poet, taught by suffering. Premature sorrows had given Adèle a power of self-control beyond her years. Monsieur de Launay was descanting learnedly on the new novel Adèle was reading; and as his intellect, though neither strong nor deep, was quick and well provided with French tact and clearness, Adèle heard him with a sort of pleasure; and answered with a vivacity and an *à propos* that surprised herself. She did not know that pain resisted doubles every power of a human being. Monsieur de Launay heard her with pleasure, and gazed at her with an admiration of which he was not perhaps conscious; but Adèle, always pretty, now looked beautiful. With silent, indignant anger, Isabella watched all. She saw her lover, half bending forward, with his tufted chin resting in his right hand, look at her sister-in-law. She saw, whilst Adèle read to him some passage in the book that had struck her, how his admiring gaze rested unchecked on the young flushed face, on the pure, bent brow, and modest, downcast eyes of Mr. Osborne's wife. She could bear no more; the lessons of the past were forgotten by one whom experience had never taught. Yield she must to the irresistible wish of inflicting on the woman who thus tormented

her some of her own jealous bitterness; she crossed the room, passed behind the chair of Adèle, and looking over her shoulder at the book she held, she said, carelessly—

"You are still in the first volume; they are in the second, I believe."

Adèle forgot her resolve. She looked beyond the magic circle will had traced, and in the glow of light shed by the chandelier, she saw her husband and Alice who stood talking across a narrow table. Mr. Osborne held in his right hand a half-closed volume: evidently the theme of his discourse; he spoke and Alice listened. The light shone on their two faces; Mr. Osborne's was as usual pale as marble, but a faint glow lit that of Alice, and a soft light shone in her dark eyes. The book dropped on the lap of Adèle; for awhile she felt petrified, then a strange, passionate storm came and silently convulsed her whole being.

"Do you feel faint?" asked the Baron, struck with her sudden and deadly paleness.

"I am thirsty," she replied, without looking at him, for her soul had passed in her eyes.

Monsieur de Launay rose to ring the bell, but Mr. Osborne, who had just taken a glass of water from a side table, and was in the act of raising it to his lips, turned round on hearing the voice of his wife, and stepping across the room he handed the glass to her. She took it with a trembling hand, and drank it slowly; as she returned it to him, he paused in the act of taking it back; he was shocked to see her so white, and he looked down at her fixedly. The

power of enchantment seemed to rivet her eyes on his face; she looked until his grave and sad though noble features seemed to write themselves in keen and burning lines on her brain. She felt like one dazzled, who would give worlds not to look, and who must look on till blinded. At length, trembling with secret pain, she closed her eyes, bowed her head, and leaned it on her hand.

"Is the room too close for you?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"No, thank you," she replied, without looking up at him; "I was only thirsty."

He walked away. She saw the skirt of a black dress moving towards her; Alice was coming.

Adèle did not give her time; she rose and left the apartment.

When the door had closed on her, Adèle flew rather than she ran down stairs, swift like a shadow she passed through passage, court and garden, and never stopped until she reached the stone steps that led to the lake. On the lowest she sat down, then with a low moan she laid her head on the cold stone above the faint ripple of the waters.

Beautiful and calm were the spot and the hour to which Adèle brought her fevered heart. What heavenly rest in that sky, pervaded with moonlight! What peace slept on those silent mountains! what stillness there was in the very eddies of that quiet lake! Alas, she saw, she felt nothing; she was conscious but of the water that flowed near her ear, but of the wild passionate woe that filled her poor young heart.

"Yes," she thought, "that is it! I love him and I am jealous! It is not for his sake I lament now. Let him suffer—he cannot suffer half so much as I do. It is not his sacrifice I regret—I am his wife, and I would not, if I could, let him be free. He has given himself to me, and I cannot and will not surrender the gift. It is not humiliation I feel; the least scrap of his liking ennobles and honours; but it is that I love him with my whole heart—as much as one being can love another, and that he does not love me—that he regrets her. That is it—that is it."

Ay, that was it. She loved, and she was jealous. To the revolt of youth had succeeded the submission of necessity, but love had not followed. She had wished herself dead because she was the wife of a man whose affection oppressed her. Religion, duty, the very hopelessness of her bondage had tamed this wild spirit into acquiescence. She had learned to endure the husband whom she had always admired; but the happy moment was gone by; he was cold; her enemies were triumphant. She suffered keenly in her affection and in her pride, yet she was not cast down; she was but a little girl, ignorant, unworthy of him, but he loved her and he had married her for love. She could defy their insolence, even as she could conquer his proud coldness yet. Ay, she could, if she but wished it, waken in his heart all the tenderness of the husband, all the fondness of the lover. She did wish it, and she succeeded; she triumphed, — what woman would not have triumphed?—but still Adèle did not love Mr. Osborne. Then came the galling discovery—the humiliating

fall. She was not—she had never been loved. His indifference divided them, like a bottomless abyss. She was not the joy and delight of his heart, the pride of his life; she was a painful accident in his existence, a something that had come athwart him and his liberty.

The suffering was too great, too keen. It awoke a new being in the hitherto passionless girl; it gave her years—their ardour and their feelings. Out of that deep grief, love, unconscious and pure like the love of youth, was born. She awoke one day glad, she herself did not know why, full of hopes she did not question, of desires she did not define. There was a glow on life like the glow of the morning sun, an enchantment like that of the early hours. Everything was sweet, pleasant, delightful. She neither knew, nor wanted to know, why or how it should be thus. She only knew that it was so. "What matter about love?" thought the prudent girl, "we are married, and we are fond of one another. What matter about love, indeed?" And she serenely folded her hands above a heart where love was calmly reigning.

She did not suspect it; she could not have believed it. Nay, more, she would have derided it. She only wished that her husband would return quickly, so that she might explain to him that new delightful theory of being fond without love. He returned, and she was mute; he was kind, and she felt frightened; he looked at another woman with an admiring eye, and devouring jealousy, though unconfessed, awoke in her heart. And now she could

think of nothing else; and night and day, and whether they were present or absent, she saw these two before her. "And I was seventeen the other day," she thought, in the solitary garden, "and I may live years, weary years, and I must go on loving him more and more, and he liking me ever less and less."

Oh! it was the torment of torments; her tears flowed like rain on that cold stone step; her moans rose plaintive, though low, on the stillness of the night; she called, with the passionate vehemence of one whom sorrow had seldom tried for the love she had all but hated, for the death she had implored to free her from its infliction. Suddenly she ceased, trembling she started to her feet and hid her burning face in her hands; she had heard a step in the alley: was it he coming to kiss away her tears, to hush in a fond embrace her child-like lament? She hoped, she wished, it was or might be; he did not love her, but still there was a charm in his tenderness, a charm sweet to feel though bitter to remember. With a beating heart she waited until the voice of Jeannette said,—

"Ah, Madame! Madame! you will take cold!"

Adèle angrily removed her hands from her face, and angrily said,—

"What brings you here? I wish to be alone."

"I shall go," quietly replied Jeannette; "but I must first say two words to Madame. Ah, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle," she cried, yielding to sudden emotion, "pray do not think of the past—pray do not; they have forgotten it as if it had never

been. For Heaven's sake! do like them, or you will be wretched."

Shame, grief, kept Adèle mute. What! she had not been able to hide her miserable weakness, her love, and her jealousy from her old servant—they were both visible to the eyes of Jeannette. She bowed her head and cried bitterly.

"Ah, Madame!" began Jeannette.

Her mistress interrupted her.

"Hush!" she said, raising her hand, "never speak so again; never say to any one that you found me here."

And she went down the alley towards the Manor, at a pace Jeannette could not hope to overtake.

Adèle entered the house and passed by the drawing-room door with a swelling heart. In there she could not go to betray to his eyes what the eyes of Jeannette had seen so clearly. She went to Anna's room, and it was not until the door had closed upon her that she saw her husband sitting with his sister.

CHAPTER II.

A VIGIL.

"WELL, but you need not take Adèle away," said Anna, as Mr. Osborne rose and passed his arm within that of his wife.

"I want her on business, and I came here for her," he answered, quietly.

"What business can you have with her?"

"Important business, which admits of no delay, Anna—so good evening."

Anna shut her eyes, and moaned, and thought it very odd that people could not keep to their own rooms, but must needs come to hers.

"I will not go into the drawing-room," wilfully said Adèle, as they reached the door of that apartment.

"I am not taking you there," replied her husband, and he led her down to his study.

A bright light burned on his table, covered with papers; he drew a chair before it, placed pen, paper, and ink in readiness, and quietly bade Adèle sit down. She obeyed, with some wonder. Mr. Os-

borne saw that the door was securely closed, then came back to his wife, and sitting down by her, he laid his arm on the back of her chair, and looked gravely in her face.

"You proved to me once," he said, "that you were a clever and prompt arithmetician; may I now put you to the test?"

"What am I to do?" she asked, eagerly.

"I shall tell you presently. You will do it all the better if you understand my drift; and there is plenty of brain in that little head," he added, pushing back the hair from her clear broad forehead, "to comprehend even such dull questions as the relative value of steam and water power."

The face of Adèle burned, but she looked at him.

"Do you really think me clever?" she asked, a little agitatedly.

"I really do. Well, what ails you?"

"Oh! I am all perversity, and you are all goodness," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck. "I behave so shamefully to you, and your kindness, your gentleness, never vary."

There was some truth in this. Mr. Osborne behaved infinitely better than his wife; and she, now all sorrow, all penitence, all tenderness, very sweetly entreated to be forgiven the last week's sins. How could he be angry? how could he help forgiving, and more than forgiving her?

"Why can I not be fairly vexed with you once for all?" he asked, looking down at her. "Why, when I feel most aggrieved, must you by word, look, or speech, remind me of that cordial little

girl who welcomed me on the evening of my arrival, who spent her little money, and brought forth her rare old wine for my table? I wonder what you will do next to torment me?"

"I will answer that question when you have told me why you brought me here," demurely said Adèle.

With a start, Mr. Osborne remembered the business he had forgotten. He became anxious at once.

"You have made me lose time," he said, "and I cannot enter into details. This much I must say; I need not tell you that the manufacture of iron is my business—that you know; but I dare say you do not know that the fusion of the ore requires a fire more intense than the mere burning of fuel in a furnace can produce?"

"Yes, indeed, I do know that; it requires a strong blast or current of air."

"Just so. Steam or water wheels are the agents that produce this current; steam is surer, water is cheaper, but faithless; steam is regular, firm, steady, like man, and water is capricious and wayward—" Mr. Osborne paused and looked at his wife.

"Like woman," she said; "thank you."

"We are not getting on at all," said Mr. Osborne, smiling; "I never lose a second with Monsieur Morel, and you have been here half an hour, and I have done nothing. I must send for him."

He pretended to rise.

"No, no—pray do not," she cried, "I shall not say another word; but do not send me away."

She seized his arm in the ardour of her entreaty,

and looked up in his face with an earnestness that struck him. Once more he felt certain of it; his wife was fond of him. She saw him bite his lip and redden, and she could not imagine why; but he had sufficient self-control to go on with the steam and water-power matter.

"Water being cheaper, I use it," he said, "and in my case it is safe; if it were to fail me, it would indeed be ruin; but it has never failed yet, and I will venture to add that it will not fail without due warning. Madame de Launay is all for steam, and for new American machines; it does not suit me to accede to her wishes, and it becomes me to prove to her that she is in error. For this I require your aid; write down in figures the replies to the questions I shall put, and you will do me good service."

Adèle took up her pen; Mr. Osborne rose, and walked up and down the room, glancing at a slip of paper which he held, and requesting her to answer questions, all based on the past and present water power of the stream that fed the forge of Courcelles.

At this work he kept her a full hour; then requesting her to stay, for that he might want her again, he left the room. In less than five minutes, the door opened again: the short, dry figure of Madame de Launay entered briskly; her tall, fair, suave nephew followed, and behind both the calm and handsome husband of Adèle. She looked at him with involuntary and unconscious pride. "There is not another like him," she thought, "not one."

Madame de Launay had gathered her brows, and was looking at her shrewdly.

"So you work with your husband," she said, taking a chair near her.

The face of Adèle beamed; she had never received a compliment she liked half so well.

"Monsieur Osborne is happy in having such a companion to share his labours," said the Baron de Launay, caressing his chin. He was standing behind the chair of his aunt, and he looked full at Adèle as he spoke.

Monsieur Osborne, without being jealous, had several times thought that if Monsieur de Launay would look more at his sister and less at his wife, he for one should much prefer it, and there was just a touch of dryness in his tone, as he said—

"You will be happy to learn from me that the American matter can be set aside. It has, in reality nothing to do with the partnership: it can delay it, it cannot do anything else."

He spoke a little sharply. Mr. Osborne hated being what is commonly called imposed upon, and in the present case he had resolved to bring the De Launays to a crisis, and not to be made the tool of too clever a business lady, and the dupe of a mock gentleman. Monsieur de Launay on hearing him, looked surprised, and said "Indeed."

Madame de Lannay took a long pinch of snuff, and at length observed: "Will you have the kindness to show us that?"

Mr. Osborne took up the paper on which his wife had written the answers to his questions, and glanc-

ing at his own little slip of memorandums, he proceeded to enter on a long but clear and convincing refutation of what he had called the American matter; he proved, and justly, that it had nothing to do with the département de l'Ain, and though he was too politic and too polite to say so, he allowed Madame de Launay to see that he considered it a *ruse de guerre* and no more, and Madame de Launay of course liked him none the less for his perspicacity; she merely questioned once or twice the accuracy of his calculations, upon which Mr. Osborne looked at his wife, who took up her pen and modestly but positively proved to the elder lady that she was right, and not wrong. It amused Mr. Osborne to see their two faces meet above the paper: one brown, withered, acute as age; the other, blooming and fair as girlhood. Very graciously Madame de Launay confessed herself conquered, and complimented Mr. Osborne on the business-like talents of his wife.

"Yes," he said, half carelessly, "I have got a good and willing little clerk; but for her I should never have been able to get through this matter this evening."

"Ah! what a house we two would have made of it," thought Madame de Launay, looking with regretful envy at Adèle. "I would have formed her with my own hands—well—well, it was not to be."

"That is all, is it not?" she said, aloud.

"All with which I need trouble you for the present," courteously replied Mr. Osborne.

Madame de Launay rose and took her nephew's arm. Adèle too, rose, but as she reached the door her husband quietly said—

"Stay."

She stopped short with sudden obedience; he walked out with his guests; the door closed; she remained alone.

She returned to her chair, and sat down. "He will come back immediately," she thought. But no: half an hour, then three-quarters of an hour elapsed, and he came not. The heart of Adèle beat, her brow burned; she leaned her cheek on her hand.

"He is talking upstairs with Alice," she thought; "he is sitting with her in that deep window they are both so fond of."

She looked up; the door opened; Mr. Osborne entered, carrying a small tray in his hand.

"What is that?" rather shortly asked his wife.

"Coffee for you."

"And why not for you, too? Stay with me!" she added, entreatingly.

"Impossible," he replied, with a smile, "Madame Lascours has just received an urgent letter, and requires my assistance."

"But why am I to stay here?" asked Adèle, rather petulantly.

"Because I have a new series of questions, which you are to answer for me. You will find them in this sheet, from one to seven. Use all the despatch you can, and bring the replies to me; but simply put them near the statuette of Joan of Arc. This is not an open battle, but a secret ambuscade: I wish to be prepared for attack; but it is not desirable I should seem to need such preparation."

Without waiting for a word of objection or reply,

he turned away. He went upstairs to talk to Madame Lascours; he left her alone in his study to perform the office of a calculating machine.

The coffee Adèle did not touch; she was all fire, all burning eagerness to do her task and go upstairs. With a swiftness that amazed her, she wrote down the replies to Mr. Osborne's seven questions, folded them in a square, and ran up to the drawing-room, trembling and impatient.

Scarcely had she entered the apartment when her look, as if by magic, sought and found her husband. He sat by Alice near one of the heavy-curtained windows; the light of the chandelier scarcely reached the half gloom of the spot; yet Adèle needed no second glance to know that they were there. She gave them but that one look; yet their attitudes, their bearing, their whole aspect, were impressed on her mind like a vivid picture never to be forgotten. She placed the square of paper as she had been told by the statuette of Joan of Arc, then she went and sat down near Madame de Launay, who was knitting assiduously.

"You must have quite a gift for figures," said the elder lady, admiringly.

"Perhaps I have," replied Adèle, smiling; "but I have no gift for knitting. Ah! what a pretty pattern!"

She bent over Madame de Launay's incipient counterpane, attentive and admiring; but she also saw her husband; she saw him rise and go to the light; she saw him take the paper from beneath the statuette, unfold it, and glance over it; she

saw even the pleased look that flashed across his face, the half triumphant smile with which he looked over at Madame de Launay, and guessing that he might not be sorry to defeat the ambuscade at once, she raised her voice and called him to admire—

"That exquisite work of Madame de Launay's."

"Is Monsieur Osborne a judge of knitting?" asked Madame de Launay.

"He is a judge of everything," replied Adèle, rising and yielding to her husband the place she occupied by the woman of business. Very composedly Mr. Osborne answered Madame de Launay's mistrustful look; Adèle walked away to a neighbouring table and turned over a volume of engravings which she did not see. Alice came up to her.

"What ailed you this evening?" she asked, gently bending to look in the face of her friend.

"I felt feverish," replied Adèle, looking up; "how good you are," she added, involuntarily, and she took the hand of Alice and pressed it. A strange love attracted her, spite of herself, to her unconscious rival; that calm, handsome face soothed her; there was a charm in the touch of that cool, white hand, the look of those serene dark eyes fell on her like peace.

"You are feverish," said Madame Lascours, softly touching her burning forehead; "child, what can ail you?"

Adèle did not answer; Madame Lascours followed the direction of her glance; she saw it fastened on Mr. Osborne. Adèle was eagerly watching him and

Madame de Launay. They were deep in discussion, that was plain. The old lady shook her head and objected, but he persisted, and at length the knitting dropped on her lap, and she gave her antagonist a raised and admiring look. He received it calmly, went on talking, then rose and came over to his wife and Alice. "He would not come if I were alone," thought Adèle, turning her flushed face away; yet it was she whom her husband addressed.

"Have you made Madame Lascours promise to return quickly?" he asked.

"Going! you are going!" cried Adèle.

"Yes," calmly replied Alice; "Monsieur Osborne's exertions in my behalf are unwearied, and there now seems some prospect of success; but I must go to Lyons and have a meeting with my late husband's heirs. I have two against me and one for me, so it is a doubtful matter, you see."

Adèle stammered something, she herself did not know what; she had but one feeling and one thought—joy—joy troubled but deep.

"Do you know I think it must be late," observed Madame de Launay, putting down her knitting; "at all events I am an old woman and I want sleep, so good evening."

"Do you still persist in your unkind intention of deserting us to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Osborne.

"Madame de Launay does not like Courcelles," said Isabella, a little sharply. She addressed no one in particular, but spoke at the Baron, who murmured an inaudible reply.

Mrs. Osborne went on entreating Madame de

Launay, who good-naturedly replied that she should be delighted to stay, but could not; she had preserves to prepare for, and finally to make. No one attempted to answer this argument, which she evidently held unanswerable. She rose and left. Her departure was the signal of a general breaking up. Alice, who was to go early, took a quiet leave from Adèle; in a few minutes Mr. Osborne and his wife remained alone in the drawing-room.

Adèle turned over the pages of the book of drawings, and looked at him; his calm, smiling face had vanished; the mask which we all put on in the world; the mask, indeed, which takes the name of good breeding, and without which there is no living in society, was dropped, and a face full of cares appeared behind it. He stood absorbed in thought, his arms folded, his brow knit, his look downcast.

"Poor fellow!" thought Adèle, with that familiarity which love takes, as well as the sublime and pathetic mood, "what a weary life he has of it."

"You need not wait for me," said Mr. Osborne, suddenly looking up, "I have to write."

He bade her good night, and left her. Adèle went up to her room, informed Madame Leroy that she did not require her services, and waited until that majestic lady had retired to the privacy of her apartment. She then threw a light silk cloak around her, and stole down through the silent house to her husband's study. He did not hear her enter until she stood by his side as he sat writing; he then turned round sharply, and gave her a surprised and anxious look.

"What ails you?" he exclaimed; "do you feel unwell? Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing," she said, a little shortly; "I only came to sit here with you. I could not sleep upstairs."

And to show him that she had no desire to intrude on his confidence, she sat down, and took a book. He looked at her, and an amused smile, which she could not see, stole over his face. He let her turn a page, then he said—

"I think, since you are so sleepless, I may as well make you useful as let you read. You will have plenty of time for that book to-morrow."

At once Adèle was by him, her eyes beaming with pleasure. He drew a chair for her by his side, and gave her as much work in the way of deciphering illegible notes and transcribing letters as she could wish for. She worked with silent zeal and diligence, never once lifting up her eyes, until at length her husband said to her—

"Why, Adèle, you are more exemplary than Morel himself."

Slowly Adèle raised her look to his face; he was leaning back in his chair, and thence he looked at her. The eyes of Adèle returned to her paper; she extended her hand to turn the page of the letter she was copying; his arrested it.

"We have had enough writing for this evening," he said; "I can see that you are not tired—of course not; but I confess I am. We will sit up awhile, and you will talk to me."

Adèle reddened and bit her lip. "Indeed I will

not," she thought; "you can find plenty to say to Alice when you sit with her by the window; and if you can find nothing to say to me, I will not speak." Accordingly, and though Mr. Osborne still held back her left arm from the papers, her right hand idly scribbled with her pen on the back of a letter, at which she looked intently.

"What, not a word!" he said with a smile, which she felt, though she did not see it; "what ails you this evening? Where were you when I looked for you everywhere, here, in your room, in the room of Anna, who received me very crossly; where were you, pray?"

"I had gone to the garden," she answered, reddening; "I felt so hot." And to check the reproof which she felt coming, she immediately added—"You may well speak of having an exemplary clerk in Morel. I heard nine strike, and I saw a light in the counting-house—he was not gone yet."

Mr. Osborne gave a start, and dropped her arm.

"Child, what are you saying?" he exclaimed; "Morel was gone before I came back."

And who, then, was in the counting house?" she asked. "I saw a light."

"No one; you saw some other light."

Adèle shook her head negatively.

"I know every light that burns within five miles," she said, "even as I know that the bell which now strikes one is the bell of Saint Jean des Roches, though you can scarcely hear it, it is so far and so faint. Say anything you like, but do not say that."

"But what should take him there?" said Mr. Osborne, his brow contracting into a frown.

"He is a traitor," said Adèle.

"An adder without fangs," replied her husband, with a scornful smile. "He can be of use to me; I defy him to hurt me." But though he spoke thus, the anxious frown did not leave his brow; he rose, he walked up and down the room; he paused, and thought; at length he opened a drawer, took forth two keys, one of the counting-house, the other of an iron safe, with a secret lock, where he kept a ledger of the private matters it was not necessary that Monsieur Morel should know; and merely saying to his wife, "I shall not be long away," he coolly left his study, and walked down the steps leading to the garden.

Adèle saw him depart with a throbbing heart; vague apprehensions of danger and coming misfortune hung over her, but she did not attempt to detain him; she did not say, "Let me go with you." She waited a few minutes, then she stole out and followed him at a distance. Like him, she went down the broad alley; like him, too, she thought to leave the garden by the low door. But he had locked it. "As if I could not get over the wall," she thought. A loose stone, the branch of a tree, a fearless leap down, and she stood, rather stunned, but safe, on the other side. Before her rose the counting-house; a light burned in it; on the glowing background she saw in dark outline the figure of her husband. She crossed the little iron bridge, beneath which foamed the mountain-stream, and went round

to the counting-house door. Mr. Osborne had left it ajar; but he heard her at once, and turned round sharply.

"Do not scold me," she began, deprecatingly, "I could not stay in the house, and I had my dress around me—so you see, I could not be cold."

"I see no such thing," he said, trying to look displeased,—vain attempt, that did not deceive her, for smiling securely, she observed—

"Well, what have you found?"

"Nothing, as yet. The books are in perfect order, as correct as arithmetic can make them. You must have been mistaken; nothing could have brought him here. I have looked in the safe, and found my own ledger there; all is right."

Adèle did not believe that all could be right; but she vainly looked around her for some sign or token of wrong. The dark, cold room was in scrupulous order; the heavy books seemed to defy censure; they looked so large, stiff, and stern; by them flared on Monsieur Morel's desk the little twisted wax taper, which her husband had brought with him, lit on his entrance, and carelessly laid there. Suddenly he gave a start.

"Adèle, did you bring this?" he asked.

She turned round. He was holding a wax taper similar to his own, but extinct.

"I did not bring it," she said at once.

Mr. Osborne frowned. He again opened the iron safe; he took out his private ledger, and whilst Adèle held the light behind him, he looked attentively over it, from the first page to the last. He

found nothing, nothing save a drop of wax on the last page but one. The finger of Adèle was laid on it at once, but her husband had already seen it. She looked at him, but he only smiled, closed the book, and put it back.

"Well," she said, a little impatiently.

"Well," he replied, "Monsieur Morel is fond of reading at night, and he uses a wax taper—like Psyche, when she wakened Love, who was sleeping. Whether he has wakened love in the present case, is another matter!"

He spoke lightly—but how severe was his brow! —how pitiless looked his anxious face!

"Ah!" said Adèle, with involuntary emotion, "I hope you will never be angry with me!"

"With you, child! Why should I be angry with you?" he asked, smoothing his aspect.

"Then I hope you never will. I could not bear it," she said.

All ungentle emotion passed away from his face; he smiled so sweetly, that it seemed to her as if he could never have been displeased; and in his mildest tones he asked—

"What could make you think of that?"

"Ah! you looked so angry!"

"Then I was not wise. That fellow is not worth anger. Besides, as I told you already, he is powerless. He may unlock the iron safe, he may read his master's private book, but there is a lock that will baffle him still—a book he cannot decipher."

"Where?" asked Adèle, looking round, "not here, surely."

"Here, in truth, and before you, too."

She looked and saw nothing, but her husband, who stood before her smiling; and she understood that the lock Morel could not open, the book he could not read, was his master.

Mr. Osborne walked up and down the counting-house. His arms were folded, his look was calmly defiant, the smile that curled his lip was full of scorn.

"I have," he said, "a profound contempt for cunning, and unmitigated scorn for deceit; their very nature is shallow; let them do their worst—they are powerless."

Aloud he spoke no more, though he was evidently communing with his own thoughts: Adèle remembered that evening in the garden when she had watched the light in the counting-house, and wondered what sort of cares they were that made that light burn there. She was there now, there with him, there as his wife, and though it did not seem as if he had or wished to have secrets from her, she felt both very near to and very far from her husband. She looked at him earnestly. "I wish he would not look so," she thought, "he will make me afraid of him;" but, of course, with feminine perversity, she liked him none the less for that.

"What ails that little girl, this evening, that she must always be looking at me?" thought Mr. Osborne, surprised; for the sin of looking at him too much was not one into which his wife had fallen often since his return. But, too polite to put so delicate a question, he merely observed, that the room was cool, and that it was time to go; and taking her arm, he led her out and locked the door behind him.

When they reached the garden door, he paused; for it was shut as he had left it.

"Pray, how did you get in?" he asked.

"I did not get in, I got over," was the prompt reply.

"Over! well done."

"Did you never get over a wall?" asked Adèle, a little shortly.

Mr. Osborne could not say that he had not, and prudently dropped the contest. The moon had vanished in the sky; the night was dark and silent, gloomy was the garden, keen and chill blew the air from the mountains across the lake. As they passed by the stone steps where Jeannette had found her moaning, Adèle asked herself what evil dream had possessed her; she felt calm, happy, not in the least jealous. This gentle and contented mood followed her to her husband's study, whither she returned with him. With diligent hand Adèle put away the papers from his table, whilst with a wearied air he threw himself in a chair and leaned his brow on his hand. Suddenly she went up to his chair, and, standing a little behind him, she said:

"Ah! what troubles—what cares there are on your mind!"

"Yes, child," he sighed, "plenty!"

It was the first time that he acknowledged so much to her. His head had sunk back wearied on the dark velvet chair, and Adèle, leaning above him, looked down at his pale face. Through the open glass door came the cool air of night, above a dark outline of mountain broke a grey space in the eastern

sky; the night had waned in this anxious vigil which Adèle had shared with him; a sweet sense of the sacredness of marriage came over her, of that partnership of the cares and troubles of life, which love may indeed make more sweet, but for which love is not always needed; which sincere esteem and religious duty can sanctify to the good and the pure.

"Ah!" she thought, "I will never be foolish, never be jealous again: I am his friend, his wife; let him sit by Alice, talk to her, let him even think: 'It would be better to have had her:' I am still the being most near to him: I am still his wife."

CHAPTER III.

BUSINESS.

How did Madame de Launay sprain her ancle? The mystery was never cleared up, but it must have been a severe sprain; Adèle found her groaning on the staircase the next morning, she saw her clinging to the bannisters and making a wry face that twisted her withered visage into the accurate resemblance of a German nutcracker, and finally she heard her declare that she was in the greatest agony.

Adèle flew down for assistance; she met her husband, and breathlessly told him the news. He started surprised, then he smiled, and leisurely went up to the sufferer. She shook her head, looked rueful, but finally allowed him to help her downstairs. She entered the Hall limping; Adèle wheeled a couch forward, Madame de Launay sank on it groaning, and her young hostess placing a cushion under the injured limb, said promptly:

"You must not go to-day—no, you must not."

"I cannot," moaned Madame de Launay.

"And Jean must run for Docteur Guillaume," pursued Adèle, warmly.

"Ah, my dear, doctors are all quacks."

"Ah, but Doctor Guillaume is not a quack," said Adèle, eagerly; "not he. Why, it is ten to one that when he sees your foot he will tell you there is nothing the matter with it."

Mr. Osborne bit his lip not to smile, and Madame de Launay said coolly,—

"The very man I want—not for the present—a hurt foot is a joke, but for the future I may be seriously ill. Docteur Guillaume will be invaluable then."

"Pray let me send for him now," insisted Adèle, "pray do." But her guest refused with a smile positive though polite, and her husband kindly patted her cheek and told her to let Madame de Launay please herself. "What ails them both?" thought Adèle, surprised.

The door opened, in came Mrs. Osborne sympathetic, and Isabella evidently delighted at an accident that would keep the aunt of Auguste in Courcelles.

"You cannot go," said Mrs. Osborne.

Madame de Launay confessed that she could not. Sunshine and fair weather beamed on the face of Isabella, but clouds returned to it, when, after breakfast, Monsieur de Launay rose and took his leave. Important business called him twenty leagues off. Isabella gave her future aunt an angry look, and Mr. Osborne smiled over his tea, which, as usual, he drank slowly, and seemed very much amused.

Very bad was Madame de Launay's foot for three days. She was able, however, to leave her room for

the saloon, both being on the same floor, and here Mrs. Osborne devotedly kept her company in the daytime; in the evening Mr. Osborne had quiet talks with the aunt of his future partner, who knitted assiduously the while. Who would have suspected that these three days were one long and continuous battle between the sick lady and the Osbornes.

Yet thus it was, and truly Mrs. Osborne had found her match and more than her match. Indefatigable, sudden, treacherous, were the attacks she had to parry from morning till night. Sometimes Madame de Launay was slow, methodical, in her tactics, like any old routine commander, but no sooner had Mrs. Osborne entered into the peculiar spirit of this warfare, than Madame de Launay was on her in masses, like a fiery young Bonaparte rushing down from the Alps on the Lombard plain, and scornfully defeating, without regard to rule or precept, the grey-bearded generals of another age. Perfidious in the extreme were her first attacks; she was very much afraid that Isabella's temper was none of the best; she doubted if she would be so able to restrain it as Mrs. Osborne supposed, she was getting old and infirm, and needed rest; and when she had lured Isabella's mother into excusing her daughter's petulance, into the most tender and flattering assurances that she, Madame de Launay, was in all the vigour of her years, and perfectly able to guide her family and rule a warmhearted though somewhat wayward girl, when, we say, Mrs. Osborne had been led thus far, and was all intent on self-defence, her antagonist suddenly put on a serious face, took off her

spectacles, and laying by her knitting, informed her that there was a sad fact her conscience would not allow her to conceal from the mother of Isabella. The father of Auguste had been subject to epileptic fits.

"But epilepsy is not hereditary," exclaimed Mrs. Osborne.

"Is it not?" asked Madame de Launay, with much naïveté.

"Not at all; besides, we can get medical opinion, you know."

"Ah, I see!" said Madame de Launay; "I understand, it is not like madness, for instance."

"Oh, dear, no! insanity is decidedly hereditary. Fits are quite another thing."

Madame de Launay resumed her knitting, much relieved; but her conscience took another qualm the next day, and would not allow her to conceal from Mrs. Osborne that the father of Auguste had been locked up for six months in a private lunatic asylum. But it was a profound secret, which no one was to know, and of which Auguste was wholly ignorant. "That woman will drive me distracted," internally exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, fairly at her wit's end.

Mr. Osborne, too, had his share of it, though with him Madame de Launay was rather more cautious and wholly business-like. Still she kept him on the alert, and for three days left him but little rest. Every evening the American matter found some new successor, which he had the vexing and wearisome task of destroying; first by facts, then by reasoning.

"How much trouble I give you," benevolently said Madame de Launay, looking up at him from

her knitting and over the gold rim of her spectacles, "but you see I am so anxious for this partnership, that I bring forward every objection I can think of, so that none will remain when it does take place."

Adèle stood at some little distance from the pair; she could see both the raised face of the aged lady and the bent look of her husband; she saw him smile in a peculiar fashion, as he replied—

"Madame, your anxiety equals mine; I desire this matter of the partnership more than you do."

"Of course, of course," she nodded. "By-the-way, how is that matter of Smithson to be settled? You know what I mean."

He knew it but too well; he frowned and bit his lip; Madame de Launay had kept for the last the most vexing and wearisome question; but he controlled himself, and merely replied that he had not thought of that, but that he would see to it.

"Ay, pray do," said Madame de Launay, again knitting rapidly.

Mr. Osborne and his wife were then alone with their guest. He looked at Adèle in a way she knew how to understand. As soon as Mrs. Osborne entered the room, she left it and went to his study; in a few minutes he followed her.

"I am making a clerk of you," he said, as he sat down by her, "but it will not be for long."

"You know very well that from the first I had a vocation that way," said Adèle, smiling; "you know very well that I always have wanted to be your clerk."

"You surely have had your wish for the last three days.

"And I have never spent three such happy days," thought Adèle, for with the absence of Alice jealousy had vanished, and calm, happy love, the love that is simply pleased even with the silent, careless presence of the loved one, had alone remained behind. Adèle had strong feelings, and jealousy could sting her into the passion of woman; but remove that torment, and though married, though fond, she was still a girl, and girlish innocence kept her heart calm and pure. She was natural, too, and allowed herself to be happy without perplexing herself to know how or why this happiness had come. Sufficient delight it now was to her to have her husband all her own—to sit by him, work with him, hear him when he spoke, and look at him when she pleased. She really did not wish for more. The calm, even kindness of his manner was to her the fulness of earthly content.

Assiduously, and without looking up, she now accomplished the task her husband had set for her. When it was finished, he said—

"I think we may rest now;" for he, too, had been busy.

Adèle looked up at him; he was pale and tired.

"Ah, you are killing yourself!" she cried. "How will all this end?"

"Truly a comprehensive question."

"I detest Madame de Launay!" exclaimed Adèle, reddening.

Her husband laughed disdainfully.

"What for, child? She is a clever woman; but she will find, and to her cost, that sincerity would

have been the better policy. Truly she will rue the day when she trifled with me."

Adèle looked at him uneasily. "Is he vindictive or resentful?" she thought. He caught her look, and seemed amused, and answered it—

"I remember the wrong I forgive," he said.

Adèle reddened and looked disturbed.

"Ah, but you will have a short memory for my transgressions," she said. "I am your wife, you know, and always to be forgiven."

Mr. Osborne was absent, but he was not so unobservant or so blind as not to have perceived how great a change had taken place in his wife. The fitful ardour of their early married days had vanished. She did not adore him half so much; but he thought —and he was not mistaken—that she loved him infinitely more. He had for the last three days been watching her closely, and everything he saw had led him to one irresistible conclusion.

For the last three days Adèle had been sweet as honey, and soft as a spring day—veiled, indeed, with light mists, but mild and delightful. Pensive without sadness she moved about the house with dreamy eyes and an absent smile, spoke only when spoken to, but looked gently on every one save her husband; his fixed look she rather shunned, yet without embarrassment or affectation. She avoided it indeed, but with the modest pride of one who will be examined too closely by none. In short, Mr. Osborne saw very plainly that the sad, melancholy wife who had replaced the merry and daring maiden had vanished, and that he had a third Adèle now, gentle,

grave, and thoughtful, with slow movements, little speech, and mien of calm content, a new woman whom he had not known before.

But he let her be what she pleased, and as she pleased; and though he now looked down at her rather kindly, his only reply to her question was—

"Do you mean to be so very naughty that you warn me beforehand to forgive you?"

"Oh, no," she said, with some warmth.

The appearance of Jean bringing in a letter interrupted the discourse. Mr. Osborne broke the seal, and read the letter with a clouded brow.

A new vexation, a new annoyance had come to him—a call for money, which he could answer, indeed, but which was worded in terms of insolent mistrust that offended him none the less for proceeding from Monsieur Mazois. "What!" he thought, with some bitterness, "is my downfall so certain that I must needs get the ass's kick?"

He rose, walked about the room, and turning round, found himself facing his wife. She had passed her arm within his, and clasped her two hands upon it.

"What ails you?" she asked, looking up at him earnestly.

"It is only a letter from Monsieur Mazois," he replied carelessly. For though he availed himself of her services, Mr. Osborne told his wife nothing of his affairs.

"No, no, that is not it," she said, "that is not what I mean. What ails you of late? What is going to happen? and why do you tell me nothing?

You have secrets, close secrets, from me? I see there is a war between you and those De Launays; I see you have some end in view which they know not, but you tell me nothing. You are not a statesman; these are not the matters of a nation that I should be kept ignorant. You told me once that all which was yours was also mine; and yet you have cares and troubles you will not let me share. You do not trust in me."

"Who would trust in such an April creature?" he replied; "you are not two days alike."

She laughed and looked conscious.

"Yes, I am seventeen," she said, "and it is the month of April with me still. And are there two days alike in the month of April?"

"Well, April is very sweet," half sighed Mr. Osborne.

"Yes, but you are not telling me your secrets," she said, petulantly.

He smiled, and told her a story.

"There was once a celebrated Italian teacher of law, named Andrea; he had a pretty, learned daughter, Novella, who occasionally took his chair and supplied his place; but lest the pupils should forget law in looking at his daughter, he had a curtain put up; behind this she spoke and taught. Apply the moral."

Adèle turned red, and looked indignant.

"And so," she said, "you make pretty speeches; you laugh at me, and you will not confide in me."

Mr. Osborne's face darkened. He dropped the

hand of his wife, which he was holding, and he said, emphatically—

"Man's confidence is born of woman's love."

Adèle looked up at him.

"Do you mean to say I do not like you?" she asked, with some vehemence.

He could not say it; he knew well enough that he had at length prevailed over this wilful little girl —that they had changed parts. It was not she who now blest her lover; it was he who could dispense and withhold happiness. He smiled, a little triumphantly.

"I dare say you like me a little," he said.

"A little," she echoed, "a little."

But he soon soothed her; he was sure, he said, that she adored him; he promised to tell her every thing; he gave her unlimited power of questioning; but he must first go and answer M. Mazois's letter. Would he be long away? she asked.

"Half an hour."

"Shall I wait for you here?"

"Yes. Are you curious, Adèle?"

"Curious! You call that curiosity?"

She looked pained and irritated; but a kind smile, a few kind and remonstrative words, again pacified her down into happy gentleness. She made him promise once more not to stay long away, then she let him go.

The afternoon was clear and fine; Mr. Osborne lit a cigar and walked rapidly through the garden on to the counting-house. He had always been fond of his wife, and now it seemed she was fond enough

of him. He loved her too much not to feel happy, and he was too much of a man not to be glad.

Monsieur Mazois and his account were well nigh forgotten by the time he reached the counting-house. He opened the door abruptly, then paused amazed on the threshold. Before him in the centre of the room, Monsieur de Launay and Monsieur Morel stood face to face, and at bay: the one small, spiteful and strong in his very spite; the other weak and foolish, spite his size and evident wrath.

"Marry her if you dare!" said the foreman, with a grin that showed all his teeth; "marry her if you dare!"

Monsieur de Launay seemed pale with fury; his fair, smooth, florid aspect was strangely discomposed; his very hair looked disturbed.

"Bless me," said Mr. Osborne, very coolly, "I thought you twenty leagues off Monsieur de Launay."

Monsieur de Launay looked confounded, and could not reply. Monsieur Morel resumed his seat, took up his pen and left him both excuse and explanation.

"Madame de Launay's foot is as bad as ever," pursued Mr. Osborne, "but perhaps you have already seen your aunt."

"I come from the house," replied the Baron, recovering at length; "I wished to speak to you. I bring news important and confidential."

"We will take a turn outside," said Mr. Osborne, "up the stream; it is a pretty wild place. Please to see to this matter, Monsieur Morel;" he tossed Monsieur Mazois's letter on the table, and followed

out the Baron who had already left the counting-house.

The two gentlemen went up the stony banks of the wild gurgling little river, that rushing down from the mountain like a torrent, soon vanished in the lake, first feeding on its way the noisy wheels of Mr. Osborne's forge. Mr. Osborne gave the spot a keen look, searching and attentive.

"We are quite alone," said the Baron.

"Oh! quite: I was not thinking of that. Pray speak." He took out another cigar and offered one to his future partner. Monsieur de Launay took and twirled it between a hesitating finger and thumb, but did not use it.

"I came to tell you of the new turn this Smithson affair is taking," he said; "my aunt has mentioned it already, I believe."

"She has; but pray go on."

Monsieur de Launay did go on. He took some pains to unfold the Smithson affair in all its windings. It was calculated to embarrass Mr. Osborne; but it had not much to do with him in reality. We need not discuss it here. They walked up and down the stream the whole time; at length, Monsieur de Launay ceased.

Silence followed; not one word did Mr. Osborne say. Monsieur de Launay gave him a surprised look; he answered it, smiling.

"You are no smoker," he said.

Monsieur de Launay said, rather stiffly, that he had been too intent on explaining that important matter to Mr. Osborne, to smoke.

"And I, to say the truth, was too intent on other thoughts to give your discourse undivided attention. You do not suppose, Monsieur de Launay," he added, looking firmly in his face, "that I am going to feign ignorance or deafness with regard to what I have just heard: My foreman daring you to marry my sister! And you, strange to say, unable to resist the threat."

Monsieur de Launay bit his lip.

Mr. Osborne resumed.

"The source and the secret of his power I ask not. All I have to say is this: over me he has no influence. So far as I am concerned, you may set his threats at defiance; I am going to part from him. I have done with him as I have done with this," he added, casting on the water the end of his cigar; "he is to me as useless and as worthless too. I kept him, spite his treasons, because he is marvellously intelligent, and in a certain way honest; but now I need him not; let him go. I give you this warning, because it were a pity such a rascal should be allowed a moment's impunity. The advice is disinterested. I need not tell you our partnership is still a very remote matter, and consequently your marriage with my sister."

"Monsieur Osborne," asked the Baron de Launay, in tones of ice, "may I ask if you mean to cast a doubt on my honourable desire of keeping my word?"

"By no means," replied Mr. Osborne, smiling, "how could I entertain an idea so wild and improbable, especially after the trouble you have taken in this Smithson matter."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Monsieur de Launay, ignoring the irony of the tone and accepting the words in their literal meaning. "With regard to that man's insolence, all I have to say is this: He is in possession of a secret, which for the sake of a third person I would not have revealed. He has not and never could have any other power over me."

They stood near the counting-house; Mr. Osborne evidently intended to turn in; Monsieur de Launay bowed coldly to him, and walking over the bridge, re-entered the garden.

Monsieur Morel's task was finished when his patron re-entered the counting-house. He silently handed to Mr. Osborne the account of Monsieur Mazois, in which he had detected an error of some importance, and hoped "Monsieur was satisfied."

"Indeed I am. Monsieur Mazois's mistake which, by-the-way, is all to his own advantage, I should not have perceived. I am obliged to you, Monsieur Morel."

Monsieur Morel was happy to think he had been the means, however humble, of obliging Monsieur.

"And yet I have too much faith in your penetration to think you will be greatly surprised at the intimation I now give you," resumed Mr. Osborne. "We must part, Monsieur Morel."

A red round spot rose to Monsieur Morel's sallow cheek.

"I have displeased Monsieur," he said.

"You have? You meddle too much. You meddle beyond your province in business matters; you meddle in my private affairs too. My sister has

received from you knowledge I had withheld from her purposely. This is not to be borne. I regret the loss of your services; but I must dispense with them."

"Has Monsieur nothing else to urge?" asked the foreman, firmly.

"I could urge until to-morrow morning, if I chose. I could urge that you were in a conspiracy with my brother, and that I defeated you both; I could urge that you read my private books at night and leave the mark of your wax tapers on the page. I could urge finally that you are a traitor full of insolence and ambition, a traitor to the De Launays with whom you are in league, and whom you do not wish to serve, a traitor to me, whom you cannot deceive. I could urge all this, Monsieur Morel, and I urge nothing, save that it is my pleasure that you should leave and that I need you no more."

Monsieur Morel had turned rather pale. But his look was steady, and in clear, calm voice, he said:

"What has Monsieur to urge against me in money matters?"

"Nothing. There, I confess, you are immaculate."

Monsieur Morel bowed.

"I am satisfied," he replied. "I have been slandered, and Monsieur has listened to slanderers, but Monsieur cannot say that he ever found my accounts wrong. I am satisfied."

"Then you are easily satisfied," said Mr. Osborne, smiling; "but it is not worth discussing." He took up Monsieur Mazois's account and walked out.

Externally Mr. Osborne had remained cool as ice; but internally his blood was boiling. He knew well enough what Monsieur Morel had been aiming at: no less than partnership with him, than marriage with Isabella. The folly of the ambition did not take away from its insolence. "He could think it, he could dare to think it," muttered Mr. Osborne, as he walked along the garden. "Dare to think it!" Ay, that he could, and he had dared to think of Mr. Osborne's wife too, and resting his claims on the indubitable fact, that he was a man, he would have dared to think of a princess had any royal lady fallen in his way. No woman was too beautiful, no lady was too high for Monsieur Morel.

"Good evening," said a gentle voice. Mr. Osborne looked up; his rigid face relaxed; Alice stood before him.

"You see," said Madame Lascours, "that I kept my word. The three days are out and here I am."

"And what news do you bring?" asked Mr. Osborne, with some anxiety.

"Failure, failure," she said, smiling.

He looked mortified and surprised. He had exerted himself strenuously to bring the relatives of Monsieur Lascours to a further recognition of his widow's rights, and he had failed; but he would not be discouraged.

"We must try what we can do in Paris," he said, cheerfully.

"Pray give it up," she replied, a little despondently.

"Indeed, I will not. Pray sit down here with me

for a few moments, and I will explain myself more fully. I would not press the matter on you now; but that it must be attended to at once."

She yielded; they sat down on a bench in one of the many shallow arbours that dented the hedge of the broad alley. Rapidly, though forcibly, he urged a new course of action.

"You have tried fair means," he said, "and you have failed. The law is your only remedy."

"The law!" she said, with a start; "the law! I have no means."

"You have right and truth; and as to the means! why leave them to me."

"No, no, I cannot—indeed, I cannot," she said, nervously. Mr. Osborne took her hand and looked gravely in her face.

"By the memory of a past we neither of us can forget," he said; "I entreat you to do me that favour."

"Monsieur Osborne," said Alice, very sadly, "you wrong yourself. I know you think that I owe my sorrows to you. I repeat it, you are mistaken. With my own hand have I dealt out my own griefs; every blessing I ever enjoyed came to me from a stranger."

"But you consent?" he urged.

"I shall think about it," she replied, rising. "Where is Adèle? I have not seen her yet."

"She is in my study. She will be happy to see you again."

He took her arm; they walked up the broad alley and soon reached the Manor. They ascended

the steps that led to the study; they entered the apartment which the declining sun filled with a warm, vivid glow, but Adèle was not there.

"She got tired of waiting," observed Mr. Osborne. He walked back to the balcony that overlooked the garden; he cast a keen, searching look over all its alleys, enclosed in boxwood hedge, but he only saw Lilian chasing her hoop before her in one of the gravelled paths. To see Lilian was to be pretty sure that Adèle was not very far away.

"Where is your mamma?" at once said Mr. Osborne.

Lilian looked up and parted the heavy hair from her forehead.

"Mamma is in the Maze," she said.

"In the Maze! and what is she doing there, reading?"

"She is crying," replied Lilian, and once more she pursued her hoop.

Mr. Osborne and Alice, who had come forward, exchanged rapid looks. He bit his lip; she seemed confounded.

"Isabella has been tormenting her again," he said; "and she, like a foolish child, has let herself be tormented. Excuse me for a while."

He rapidly descended the stone steps and crossed the garden. Half-way to the Maze he met Isabella walking briskly, like one who has been somewhere and is returning. Her brother's face darkened. He stopped short before her, and looked severe.

"You have been to the counting-house?" he said.

Isabella gave a start and reddened too, but she did not deny.

"You have been to the counting-house," he said again, more severely. "I am displeased with you, Isabella. You have made Monsieur Morel give you improper information; but do you know what price you have paid for it? He has given you a place in his thoughts. I tell you this on purpose. Let the mortification be a warning to prudence in future. You are not, I fear, Isabella, a very prudent woman."

Isabella drew herself up and looked three inches taller.

"I am obliged to you for the lecture," she said haughtily.

"I have not done," pursued Mr. Osborne. "I need not remind you how you interfered once between my wife and me. You promised not to offend so again. How is it that you have broken your word this very day?"

"I do not know what you mean," said Miss Osborne, frigidly; "I saw your wife to-day, but I do not think I opened my lips to her. I suppose she has relapsed into melancholy; but you surely, with your penetration, cannot be ignorant of what ails her."

"And pray what ails her?" asked Mr. Osborne, struck with his sister's tone.

Isabella smiled disdainfully.

"You do not suppose," she said, "that I am going to draw down on myself the wrath of Adèle, as I once drew down the wrath of her husband?—No,

no, I shall not interfere between married people in a hurry.

She gathered up her sweeping skirts and walked away. Mr. Osborne went on to the Maze. Adèle was still there; her tears had ceased, but she stood rigid and pale, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of Silence, with her cheek on her hand and her eyes bent on the earth. Her husband went up to her, and passed his arm around her.

"Adèle, what ails you?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied, listlessly.

"I was delayed by Monsieur de Launay," he said; "Madame Lascours, too, has come back; she wishes to see you."

Adèle neither moved nor spoke.

"What ails you?" he asked again with tender entreaty.

"Nothing," she said, impatiently. She turned her face away, and looked both haughty and defiant. He bit his lip.

Was this the girl who barely an hour before had looked up at him soft as the dew of the morning which the scorching sun has not yet drunk up, who had looked up at him with something so like modest love in her eyes, that if it were not that, he knew not what it could be. "There is no understanding her," he thought, with an impatient sigh. "Ah, have I not cares, not troubles enough, but she must add to them?" And angrily, yet with a sort of tenderness in all his anger, he took her in his arms, and he said—

"Adèle, this is too much; you trifle with me as

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you should trifle with no man, least of all with a husband. You love me, yet—"

"I—I!" she interrupted, trembling and indignant. "You can say that!"

"And can you deny it?" he asked, amazed and angry at such strange caprice.

"You taunt me—you taunt me with it!"

She clasped her hands together with a sort of despair; then she broke from him like a wild thing, and darting down the windings of the Maze, she vanished.

Mr. Osborne stood where she had left him, pale and wrathful. It was indeed too much. His love was cooling; his patience was exhausted; he did not even think of what ailed his wife; he simply thought it would be very strange indeed if he gave her the opportunity of trifling thus with him again.

CHAPTER IV.

MÉRIGNY.

"I WISH you would look a little more pleasant either of you," said Anna, looking from Isabella to Adèle, who were both sitting with her in her room, Isabella imperially leaning back in her chair, Adèle with her arm resting on the corner of the mantelpiece, and her head on her arm, like a young Meditation.

"Pleasant!" echoed Isabella, yawning, "why, I am sick of my life—sick of my future aunt especially. What an evening we had of it last night.—Ma and Talleyrand at chess, I doing nothing, William looking at Madame Lascours."

Anna coughed.

"Pooh!" superbly said Isabella, "you need not cough! Adèle knows William admires Alice."

"Not more than I do," said Adèle, without changing her attitude.

"Granted; but he looks at her more than you do. Well, it is monotonous to have but one man who has eyes, ears, and speech but for one woman."

"I wish you would not!" said Anna, uneasily.

Adèle looked up with some pride.

"Both William and I love and admire Alice," she said. She rose and left the room.

She went down to the garden. Sunny and warm was the morning; but the time when Adèle rejoiced with youthful delight in sunshine and heat had fled. She looked at the sky, and she saw it not—at the lake, and it was a sheet of water that had no meaning; the bright flowers on their stems, the invisible birds singing sweetly in the boughs of trees told her no enchanting story of beauty, love, and joy. Alas! the once careless girl was now a careworn woman who moved in a burning dream, haunted by two spectres—Jealousy and Love. She sat down on a bench, and opened the book which she had brought with her, and which, as usual, her fixed eyes saw, but did not read; and wrapt in her own thoughts, she was not conscious that her husband stood looking at her with a sad and severe face. She did not see him until he silently sat down by her side; then with a start she raised her eyes and gave him a timid and doubtful look.

Her inexplicable caprices seemed to have wearied Mr. Osborne's patience; her want of openness seemed to have alienated his affection. He called her no more to his study; as much as he could he avoided her; he rarely spoke to her; he never looked at her; and sad fact, of which Adèle was keenly conscious, when they met or remained alone, an annoyed constrained meaning passed over his face, and altered its sweet and benignant expression to something which her aching heart construed, though wrongly, into

aversion. Hesitatingly she now looked up at him. What could make him sit thus by her? Somewhat abruptly, he said—

"Doctor Guillaume recommends Mérigny; are you willing to go?"

Mérigny was a little watering-place some twenty miles off, to which Doctor Guillaume was rather noted for sending troublesome patients. He had got tired of Madame Osborne's incomprehensible illness, and advised her husband to send her there. The book of Adèle dropped on her lap; she clasped her trembling hands above it, but she said calmly enough,—

"Oh, yes; I am willing."

She looked wretched. Mr. Osborne bit his lip; his brow darkened, but he controlled himself, and observed,—

"If, at the end of a month, the waters have done you no good, we can come back here and"—he paused: a burning blush had suffused the face of his wife; she reddened to her very hair; her eyes beamed with pleasure; her lips parted into a happy smile; she let her book slip from her lap to the earth, and clasping her hands on his arm, she said, softly,—

"You are coming with me?"

"Yes; Madame Lascours cannot accompany you."

Adèle started to her feet and clapped her hands.

"God bless that pearl of doctors," she cried; "when are we going? To day—now?"

"To-morrow."

"And why not to-day."

"Because it is impossible."

"Ah! if you wished for it as much as I do," she cried, ardently, "we should go this moment. Well, where are you going?" she added, chagrined to see him rise.

"To the counting-house."

Her brow cleared; she passed her arms within his, and walked with him to the end of the garden. She talked the whole of the way; she gathered flowers and threw them away in the lightness of her heart; she laughed, she sang snatches of songs in Patois; she seemed beside herself with joy.

"A new fit of amiability," thought Mr. Osborne, taking it very coolly, yet he could not help observing, as they parted,—

"You are an incomprehensible little girl."

Adèle laughed saucily in his face, and thought, as she ran away gaily along the alleys, "Ah! but I understand myself though." She certainly did, and, for the moment, she was perfectly happy; her joy, like her grief, ever ran into extremes; moderation is unknown to youth; her jealousy was gone; her husband was taking her away from the scene of her torment; for her society he was relinquishing the sight and presence of Alice; grief was a folly and life was a delight.

This blissful mood lasted, until entering the conservatory, she found Madame Lascours there. Unconscious of the joy she was blighting, Alice told her calmly that she was going to Paris the next day, that she would stay a week, then join her and Mr. Osborne at Mérigny. Adèle looked moody; the ardour of her joy fled; Mérigny lost its charms; it

was a place like another, it was no more a demi-paradise.

"But why do you not come at once with us? What can you want to go to Paris for?" asked Adèle, a little ironically.

Madame Lascours felt and looked surprised to find Adèle so ignorant of a matter which she had placed entirely in Mr. Osborne's hands.

"You know what I went to Lyons for," she observed.

"I know nothing, Alice. Tell me nothing, he might not like it."

"But I can tell you my own affairs, child. You know that to your husband's kind interference I owe the little provision I have. He thought it insufficient, and asked for more; the reply was a withdrawal of that provision, such as it is. I went to Lyons to appeal to the cousins of my late husband, and I failed. Monsieur Osborne urges law proceedings, previous to which I must go to Paris and see the other heirs; it is a vexatious business, of which he takes on himself all the burden and the toil."

Adèle smiled rather oddly, "He is so good," she said.

Mr. Osborne did not leave the counting-house until the dinner bell rang. As he entered the Manor, and approached the door of the dining-room, he heard the clear, free laugh of Isabella, "De Launay is come," he thought. A cloud passed over his face; Monsieur de Launay's previous visit had been a mere flying call, but Madame de Launay's foot had been progressing; he now probably came with

more serious intentions. His presence recalled Mr. Osborne to vexatious cares he had for a while laid aside, but he smoothed his aspect and entered the apartment.

Monsieur de Launay was even unusually cordial to his future partner, just as he was even unusually attentive to his future bride: in high spirits he seemed, but Mr. Osborne watched him closely, and he could see that under that fair show Monsieur de Launay was ill at ease.

"He is come to take me away," said Madame de Launay; "to-morrow morning shall rid you of your sore-footed guest."

Isabella being in an excellent temper, was amiable and gracious. She went and sat by the aunt of her betrothed, and said with some cordiality,—

"And why should you go? why not stay another week with us until you are well—quite well?"

"My opinion quite," said the Baron.

His aunt looked at Isabella over her gold spectacles, and gently patted Miss Osborne's blooming cheek.

"I cannot stay," she said, "but I can take you away for a week; shall I?"

Isabella reddened and laughed.

"A decided improvement on the original plan," cried Monsieur de Launay, looking at Mrs. Osborne, who looked at her stepson.

"Why not?" he said ironically.

The entrance of Alice and Adèle interrupted the discourse. Dinner began.

Mr. Osborne saw without much surprise that the sunshine had all vanished from the face of his wife.

"Of course," he thought; but he was vexed and concerned to perceive that she scarcely eat. She smiled when Alice stooped and whispered a remonstrance; she accepted everything the Baron helped her to, but the food remained untouched on her plate. Dinner was over; Mrs. Osborne took the arm of Adèle in order that Auguste might remain to Isabella, and that Isabella might remain amiable. She led her to the drawing-room, whither the company had all adjourned, whispering confidential murmurs the whole way. When Isabella and her betrothed were fairly together, Mrs. Osborne dropped her daughter-in-law.

At once Mr. Osborne went up to Adèle, and standing by her as she leaned against the mantelpiece and idly handled an Indian fire-screen of delicate ivory, he said,—

"I am sorry to tell you that owing to Monsieur de Launay's arrival, I cannot accompany you to Mérigny to-morrow."

"Do you regret it?" she asked, with a smile, of which he felt, though he could not understand the irony.

He gave her a displeased look and walked away. Truly, his wife was something more than incomprehensible. He took no further notice of her, but went and sat by Alice. He looked up at her face with a fixedness of which he was unconscious. Its unchangeable beauty, which no cloud of temper ever darkened, seemed to sink into his very heart. "Would to Heaven that I had married her eight years ago," he thought, with some passion,

and a vision of calm, heavenly peace, of the serene joys a beautiful and good woman can give to man, came to him with dangerous power; with dangerous regret he dwelt on those eight years which he might have had, and which Alice had given to an old man whose very fondness was tormenting and suspicious; with dangerous pleasure his look lingered on that lovely countenance, until the surprised glance and rapid blush of Madame Lascours recalled him to himself, and reminded him that what might have been was not, that Alice was nothing to him, nothing but the friend of his wife, of his wife whom he had for a moment forgotten. A little moodily he looked up at her. She still stood as he had left her, by the mantel-piece playing with the ivory screen, her back was turned towards him, her averted look shunned his. With his usual composure Mr. Osborne turned to Madame Lascours, and spoke to her of the business that was taking her to Paris.

Alas! Adèle had seen and divined all. The mirror above the mantelpiece reflected the whole room: it was clear and deep, and but too faithful. She saw her husband look at her friend as he should have looked at none save her; for his look expressed something beyond that impartial admiration of beauty which can never offend: it expressed in language, but too plain, emotion, tenderness, regret, blending with the unavailing desire of impossible happiness. With eager eyes that seemed as if they could not see too much, with lips parched and parted, she looked and drank deep draughts of bitter and jealous sorrow. She looked and she saw the blush of

Alice wakening him from the contemplation, she saw the glance of secret resentment he cast at her—and drearily, though low, she laughed at herself, at the promises of life, at the love of a man's heart.

Unhappy child! She did not know that her own folly was working fast her own undoing; that the suffering woman was expiating the wayward wilfulness of the wild and rebellious girl.

Mr. Osborne had not long been sitting by Alice, when he rose again and went to his wife.

"Madame Lascours has been mentioning some facts to me," he said, "which make me think it more advisable for me not to go to Mérigny, with you.—Do you object to go with Mrs. Osborne?"

"Oh! no!" said Adèle, apathetically, "it makes no difference."

"I dare say not," thought Mr. Osborne, with a bitter smile; but he merely observed:

"From a few words which she dropped at dinner, I know that Mrs. Osborne will be glad enough to go. Still," he added, lowering his voice, "if you object to her for your companion—"

"I do not," interrupted Adèle; "stay by all means, if business keeps you here."

"Oh! I shall go and see you, several times a week at least," he said.

"Do not put yourself out to come to me," observed his wife; "I know you have plenty to occupy you here."

"Incorrigible?" said Mr. Osborne, with gentle reproach.

She returned his look with one of sad defiance,

that seemed to say, "you cannot read me, do what you will."

"Tell me again that you do not object going to Mérigny with Mrs. Osborne."

"I do not."

He left her, and being desirous to conclude this matter at once he went up to his stepmother, and made the proposal.

Whilst he sat by her talking, Alice rose and came up to Adèle.

"What ails you?" she asked; "are you ill? Why are you so pale? Ah! Mérigny must give you another look than that."

"When do you go to Paris?" asked Adèle.

"I do not go; I stay here, Monsieur Osborne—"

The approach of Mrs. Osborne, bland and sweet, interrupted her.

"That Mérigny plan is delightful!" she exclaimed.

"Enchanting!" said Adèle, mocking at her own misery. He was sending her away; he was staying with Alice.

"The waters work miracles," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "we will bring her back fair as a lily, blooming as a rose," she said to Alice. "Shall we go to-morrow?" she added, patting the cheek of Adèle—its deadly coldness struck her. "She is going into a decline decidedly," thought Mrs. Osborne; but aloud, her prognostications were of the brightest; and again she urged the necessity of prompt departure.—"Say to-morrow after breakfast," observed Mr. Osborne, joining the group.

"After our guests and friends are gone," suggested Mrs. Osborne.

"Precisely! Does the hour suit you, Adèle?" he asked, addressing his wife.

"Oh, yes!" she answered, listlessly.

Mr. Osborne walked away. In a little while he and Madame Lascours were sitting apart, divided by a narrow table covered with papers relating to her affairs. Above it, lit by a lamp which burned there for their own use, Adèle saw their two faces the whole of that evening.

"And so you, too, are running away?" said Madame de Launay, near whom she sat; "Madame Osborne goes with you; Mademoiselle Osborne comes with me. Why, who remains in the house to keep poor Monsieur Osborne company?"

"His sister Anna," gravely and coldly replied Adèle.

No more was said.

Dull and grey was the next morning; but Mrs. Osborne thought it would keep up, and Mr. Osborne confirmed the opinion. There was only one rather awkward matter—Madame de Launay's carriage was not coming, and Mrs. Osborne was all confusion at the idea of leaving that esteemed lady behind. Indeed she informed her dear William that she could not think of going until the excellent lady to whom she was to confide her darling had departed with that said darling safe under her wing. But a five minutes' conversation with William produced a great change in Mrs. Osborne. Instead of wishing to delay departure, she was all for hastening it. She could

not go too soon; there could not be too much despatch. She ran up to the room of Adèle all anxiety.

"My love," she said, "it is a beautiful day. I hope you will remember that ten is the hour. It would be no use waiting for them to go first. Can I do anything to assist you?"

Adèle, who was extremely pale, heard her with apathetic wonder. She calmly replied—

"I am ready, but we must breakfast first."

"I suppose we must," regretfully said Mrs. Osborne. "Well, dear, you will not forget that ten is the hour?"

She left. Adèle remained a little while behind, then went down stairs. She met Jeannette on her way.

"Madame—Madame," moaned the old woman.

Adèle merely raised up her finger warningly, and went down without a word. At the door of the dining-room she found Alice. Madame Lascours gave her an alarmed look,—

"You are pale as death," she said.

"Mérigny will do me good," replied Adèle. She pushed the door open, and entered.

Mr. Osborne, who was talking to his stepmother, turned round and gave his wife a brief look, then resumed his discourse. The Baron paused in his courtship with Isabella, they sat apart, to give the mistress of the house a surprised and concerned gaze. Madame de Launay put down her knitting and shook her head. Adèle sat down by the breakfast-table, and presided over the meal as usual. Mérigny formed the theme of discourse.

"Oh, it is the most horrid little place," said Isabella, "with *crétins, goîtres*, and all kinds of horrors."

Madame de Launay drily observed,—

"I was born in Mérigny."

"Were you really?" said Isabella, not in the least disconcerted; "well, I should not have imagined that."

"There are many things in this world which you would not have imagined," rather tartly observed the old lady.

"I dare say there are," coolly retorted the young one.

Mrs. Osborne felt with alarm a forthcoming battle. She trod on her daughter's toe underneath the table, but, to her confusion, Madame de Launay uttered a scream,—

"Oh, Madame, my foot! pray be careful. It is still extremely tender."

Mrs. Osborne overflowed with apologies.

"There is the carriage," said Alice to Adèle.

Every one rose to look at it, save Madame de Launay and Adèle. From the window Mr. Osborne heard the elder lady say to his wife,—

"My dear, you have taken no breakfast;" and Adèle answered, in a low tone, "I was not hungry."

It was the carriage.

"My love," said Mrs. Osborne to Adèle, "are you ready?"

Mechanically Adèle rose, and said that she had only to go upstairs and put on her bonnet and cloak, and that she would be down in a few minutes.

The door closed upon her; Mr. Osborne walked up and down the room and seemed lost in thought. Alice stood at the window looking at Jean helping the coachman to strap the luggage of the two ladies behind the carriage, and Mrs. Osborne made use of the few moments she had to spare to go and bid Anna adieu. She promptly returned, bonnetted and shawled, and looking around the room, she saw, with a touch of annoyance she could not quite conceal, that Adèle had not yet come down. But even as she was expressing her apprehension of rain, and her regret at delay, howsoever short, the door opened, and Adèle entered. At once Mrs. Osborne's countenance cleared.

"Right, quite right, my love, we shall be in excellent time, and we shall have a beautiful day."

The adieux began. Mrs. Osborne was gracious to Madame de Launay and Alice, cordial to her stepson, fond to Isabella, and all in five minutes. Adèle was as prompt, though more silent. She held out her cheek to Madame de Launay, gave her hand to Isabella, embraced Alice, with a long, sad look, and finally turned to her husband.

"I shall see you into the carriage," he said, taking her arm within his. The dining-room door closed behind them, and no one followed them out. Mrs. Osborne was already standing on the stone steps of the Manor, talking to the coachman, and impressing upon his mind the necessity of taking the best of the two roads that led to Mérigny. And Adèle, standing in the gloom of the half-open door, through which she saw the carriage that was to bear her away, the

long road that carriage was to take, was parting from her husband. She gave him her hand, she held up her face, but he did not embrace her.

"Good bye," she said.

But he did not bid her farewell.

"I shall write," she said, "and I dare say you will find a few minutes to answer me."

"Ah! child," he exclaimed, "how have I deserved that you should do me this wrong?"

"But if you have not much time?" observed Adèle.

"Am I a tyrant?" he said, with subdued vehemence; "have I ever shewn a wish to control you beyond your pleasure?"

Adèle did not reply.

Mrs. Osborne, having by this finished her exhortation to the coachman, turned round, and coughed gently. At once Mr. Osborne left his wife and went up to his step-mother.

"My dear madam," he said, "I am extremely sorry to have put you uselessly to so much trouble. But Adèle cannot go. She is not well."

Mrs. Osborne looked bewildered, then annoyed, and finally sympathising—

"How very unfortunate," she said—"I mean that she should be unwell. My dear child, what is it ails you?" she added, going up to her daughter-in-law, and looking at her with some curiosity.

Adèle did not answer, but averted her face, which was burning red.

"Ah! a headache, I see," promptly said Mrs. Osborne; "the worst of all things."

Still Adèle did not speak. She seemed overwhelmed with confusion and shame. Mr. Osborne, though sorely displeased, pitied her, and to free her from this close and not very friendly scrutiny, he briefly told Jean to dismiss the carriage, and with a shorter apology than his natural courtesy would have dictated, he parted from his step-mother, and taking the arm of Adèle he led her, without a word, to his study. He made her enter first, then he closed the door, and he not merely closed, but he bolted it. He was resolved once for all to have a clear explanation with his wife, and internally he vowed that she should not leave him without a full confession. But there were two doors to the study, and no sooner did Adèle hear him bolting that by which they had entered, than, like a bird, she flew through the door that led to the garden.

CHAPTER V.

PARTNERSHIPS.

SPITE his vexation, Mr. Osborne could not help laughing; but even though he laughed, his brow was dark: his anger against Adèle had reached its extreme point; and it would have been better for her to have braved the breaking of the thunder-cloud than to leave him to brood silently over the insult—for such he held it—which she had offered to him; the more he thought over it, the more indignant he felt. What! he could not in so simple a thing have the confidence of his wife? She had received with transport the proposal of going to Mérigny; she had, with entire acquiescence, submitted to the escort of Mrs. Osborne; she had, and more than once, too, assured him that the change made no difference to her, and after this she had spent the night in a grief of which she thought him unconscious; she had not been able to eat the next morning, and, finally, she had bid him adieu with a look that made him feel he was a tyrant and she was a victim; as if anything would have been more simple and more easy than to say frankly that she would rather stay than go!

"I thought her frank and open as day!" thought Mr. Osborne, bitterly. "Ah, what a delusion? Ah, marriage, what a sad unveiler thou art!"

He sat down, and fell into a bitter reverie; a light sound soon roused him, but he did not look up; he knew well enough it was his wife who stood by his chair.

"No, you shall not be angry with me," said Adèle, "not even one hour. I am come back, you see, of my own accord, to be scolded and forgiven."

She spoke in that soft, girlish voice which had always had a strange charm for his ear, and strange power over his heart. He looked up at her; she stood by his side with childish attitude and childish grace. He passed his arm around her; he drew her on his knee; he pressed her to his heart with the last fervour and the last fondness of a love which he felt—and with woe he felt it—was expiring fast. With fondness, with vehemence, with passion and reproach, he spoke.

"Child," he said, "you try me too much. I am not a God, infallible, ever just, unchangeable. I am a man, frail, erring, subject to a hundred weaknesses; and I tell you that you try me too much. I tell you that I feel with dread the time fast coming when we two shall be as aliens and strangers; when, though one home, one board, one roof should still be ours, we shall be more asunder than is the man of to-day from the woman yet unborn. I tell you that you try me too much; my patience is exhausted, my confidence is outraged, my affection is estranged by caprices so incessant, by conduct so inconsistent, by a bearing

so opposed to love as are yours, I tell you that you try me too much."

Adèle did not answer one word—she felt in a dream.

"Come," he said, softening his tone and his look, "have confidence in me once for all; let your husband be your friend; let him understand you, let him make you happy if he can. Do not treat him as—God help me, that you should compel me to say the word—do not treat him as your enemy!"

Adèle smiled, passed her fingers in his dark curls, and looked up in his face.

"My enemy," she said, "you my enemy! Ah, blessed be the day then when I first saw my enemy!"

He was moved to the very heart; he knew not what to say—he knew not what he felt. Her gentleness made him feel weak as a child; her looks—modest as the tones, as the looks of a girl, yet fond, spite all she could do—confounded him. If it was not love, what could it be? He looked down at her, longing to pierce with that gaze, to unravel with the force of his will the secrets of that heart, the web of that mystery. Her eyes were fastened on his very strangely, and very strangely, too, her parted lips smiled.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"Do not ask me," she said, in a low, sad tone.

"But you must tell me!" he insisted; for he thought her answer would be a guiding clue.

"Do not ask me," she said again; but she saw his displeased look; she hastily added, clinging to him as if fearful lest he should go away, "well, well, I

shall tell you. I was thinking—'Ah, what a good thing if I could die now.'"

Tears of anger and grief rose to Mr. Osborne's eyes.

"Ah, it is too much!" he said, rising and putting his wife away, "it is too much, Adèle!"

For he felt that if his wife loved him, such love was too dreary, too tormenting. It was, indeed, a love that would have made him bless indifference.

"You asked me," she said, sadly, "and I answered your question; why are you angry with me?"

He felt the justice of the reproach; he came back to her; again he took her in his arms; again he pressed her to his heart; again he spoke.

"Child," he said, with mingled pathos and sorrow, "I appeal to you for the last time: tell me what ails you—there is a redeeming virtue in truth; your words may seem bitter to me now, but I have no doubt that when that is past they will bear good fruit to us both. Does anything that preceded or followed our marriage trouble you?—Say so—I will make all clear, and time will show you that all can be made happy too. But speak—whatever you do, speak."

Adèle remained silent. Speak, indeed? Tell him "I am in love with you, and I am jealous." She would have died first.

"For the last time," again said her husband, "I appeal to you. Now is the moment for you—for me—on my word of honour—if you do not answer me now—as I am a man—as I am a gentleman—I

will never, come what will, trouble you with a question again."

He spoke without anger, but with the calmness of settled purpose and inexorable will. The heart of Adèle sank within her, but she could not speak, she could not even utter one word. There was a spell on her tongue that charmed her into silence. He waited, and waited vainly. He rose and put her away without anger, without unkindness.

"Very well," he said, "let it be."

But spite of himself, he sighed; the last sweet drop had melted away out of his marriage cup, and only the miserable dregs remained behind. He took his hat and walked out of the room, down the flight of stone steps into the garden, but the voice of his wife called him back. He returned, and found her in tears.

"Oh, do not leave me in unkindness!" she cried.

"I am not leaving you in unkindness," he said, and he waited, evidently expecting that she would speak. She did not.

The door opened, and Mrs. Osborne came in, looking rather frightened.

"William, their carriage has come," she said; "will you speak to Isabella?"

"Yes; send her to me."

"My dear," said Mrs. Osborne, addressing her daughter-in-law, "will you not come and bid the De Launays adieu?"

Adèle rose apathetically. Her husband took her arm and led her to the window; there, lowering his voice and looking full in her face, he said—

"The De Launays are going. When they are gone, you will have something to tell me."

"Nothing," she replied.

"You may alter your mind. I give you until their departure is over to think upon it."

He released her. She left the room with her mother-in-law, and proceeded with that lady, who looked anything but composed or at ease, to the Hall.

Madame de Launay was as brisk as a bee; her nephew looked abstracted; Alice was not present; Isabella was silent and suspicious, and stood apart.

"My dear, William wishes to speak to you." said her mother; "you will find him in the study."

Isabella's colour faded a little, but she merely bent her head apologetically, and walked out of the room.

"Well, but are we, or are we not, to have that fair daughter of yours?" said Madame de Launay; "I mean, are we to take her away or not?"

"The matter rests with her brother," gravely replied Mrs. Osborne.

"I am afraid you are not well," said Monsieur de Launay, bending over the chair of Adèle.

She did not even answer him. She felt cold, listless, and dead.

The door opened, Mr. Osborne and his sister walked in. Had Isabella gazed at the Medusa that she looked so rigid and so stony? She went to the farthest window and sat there. Mr. Osborne went to the mantel-piece, and leaning against it, he looked at Madame de Launay, and said,—

"You are going?"

"Immediately," was the brisk reply.

"Then I perceive," he calmly said, "that now must take place an explanation I thought to defer."

Monsieur de Launay took out his handkerchief and raised it to his lips and coughed; Mrs. Osborne looked uneasy; Madame de Launay knit her brow and moved on her chair; Isabella sat by the window rigid as stone, and Adèle looked very earnestly at her husband. "He is going to judge them all," she thought, "and after them he will judge me." He resumed,—

"It is now some months since Monsieur de Launay did me the honour of wishing to enter into a partnership with me. I lent a willing ear to his proposals; there were many reasons why I should. I was beset with difficulties which, with resonable advantage to himself, he could remove. How and why this partnership, nevertheless, was delayed until it has ceased to be advantageous to him and useful to me, I need not say; we know it. I need but observe that I now once for all decline it."

"I cannot but say that I approve you," put in Madame de Launay, resolved to conclude this matter once for ever.

Her nephew did not venture to open his lips; indeed, he scarcely would have had time to do so, for Mr. Osborne had observed,—

"My chief reason for declining this partnership is one that concerns you too closely for me not to mention it now: I am leaving this business before it leaves me."

Madame de Launay took a pinch of snuff and said—

"Ah! bah!"

No one else spoke. Madame de Launay took a second pinch of snuff, and said—

"And who succeeds you?"

"No one; the house of Osborne and Cie. expires with me."

And there is no denying that, as he said it, Mr. Osborne looked with ironical pleasure at Madame de Launay. She looked and she was confounded. That Mr. Osborne should die slowly, giving her time to withdraw safely from the connection, was only a matter of course in the way of business: that he should withdraw suddenly, with the rare wisdom of not grasping like a drowning man at every plank of safety, was to Madame de Launay like the unexpected loss of a limb. She made a wry face, and gave Mr. Osborne anything but a kind look; but she could not exactly say: "Why did you not ruin yourself to serve me?" She took a third pinch of snuff, and observed:

"You are a wise man, Monsieur Osborne;" and taking off her spectacles and putting them on again, she added, emphatically: "You are a wise man."

Mr. Osborne bowed and smiled; there is no denying that the praise of his enemy gratified him. He resumed:

"There is another delicate question connected with this partnership: My sister has informed me, that even as I decline the partnership so must she decline the honour of Monsieur de Launay's hand. Her reasons are so obvious that I need not mention

them; so excellent that I hope no attempt to combat them will be made."

No such attempt was made by Madame de Launay. She merely pinched up her lips and shut her eyes; her nephew went up to a window and leaned against it, visibly affected. Then taking a sudden resolve, he crossed over to Isabella, who sat in the other window; and though she neither moved nor looked at him, he said, with great earnestness:

"Mademoiselle Osborne, this is impossible—I will not—after all that has past—I will not believe it, unless I hear it from your own lips."

Isabella rose and stood before him. "My brother has said the truth," she said.

"Oh! I cannot believe that this resolve sprang from you," he persisted.

With something between grace and dignity Isabella resumed:

"Monsieur de Launay, I will not do my judgment the wrong of saying that I have altered that opinion of you which I expressed by the consent I now withdraw. I will say but this: I cannot and I will not enter a family where I cannot bring as much as I receive." She bent her head, and left the room.

Monsieur de Launay looked so moved, that at once his aunt rose.

"Be it so," she said; "I admire Mademoiselle Osborne's spirit, and I approve it."

All was over. Mrs. Osborne, who had hoped to the last, vainly looked at her stepson. No sign of relenting appeared on his face; no attempt at reconciliation passed his lips.

"Auguste, give me your arm," said Madame de Launay. "Au revoir, Madame Osborne. Good-bye, my dear; I hope Mérigny will do you good yet. Thank you, Monsieur Osborne, I do not want your arm. My foot is wonderfully well."

Mr. Osborne had no doubt it was; but persisted, nevertheless, in seeing his guests into their carriage. Monsieur de Launay handed his aunt in; he was so disturbed that he had quite forgotten to bid either Mrs. Osborne or Adèle adieu, then bowing coldly to his ex-partner and ex-brother-in-law, he too entered the carriage; Jean closed the door; the coachman cracked his whip; the carriage rattled down the stony road. The partnership was dissolved; the ambitious dreams of Isabella were over.

And pale and dreary, the disappointed girl stood before her brother as he closed the door, and she descended the staircase.

"Are they gone?" she asked.

"They are."

"The mean, despicable—" tears closed the reproach.

"Do not be too harsh upon him," said Mr. Osborne, calmly; "he likes and admires you, and I doubt, Isabella, if you ever liked or admired him."

Isabella looked full of scorn.

"I admire him, indeed! I never did. But you mistake, William. Monsieur de Launay's taste was too correct to admire so unworthy an object as Isabella Osborne, whilst there was a so much more perfect object in the way."

"I suppose you mean Madame Lascours," he observed coldly.

She gave him an ironical look, and turned away without a word.

Mr. Osborne entered the Hall as his stepmother was leaving it. Adèle was sitting in the same spot and in the same attitude. Her husband went and sat by her. He looked at her silently. She made an effort to speak.

"Is it true?" she said. "Are you really giving up that business, that was wearing you to death?"

"I am, indeed."

She threw her arms around his neck.

"Thank God," she said, "I am glad, I am—indeed I am. But are you sure it is all over?"

"I am quite sure. The task I undertook a year ago at my father's will is over. It has brought me a world of cares, sleepless nights, anxious days, the treachery of a brother, the dishonesty of a servant, the bitterness of a whole family, and given me but one doubtful blessing that slipped in unawares." Adèle gave him a wistful, and agitated look. "It has left me," continued Mr. Osborne, "poorer in pocket, too, than when I accepted this melancholy legacy, but what of that. I did my best, man can do no more."

"But you will have rest now," said his wife.

"I shall, I hope, have peace. I have done with Robert—I have done with the business, a little more and I shall have done with Mrs. Osborne and her daughters."

"They are going away?"

"They are. I have said so to Mrs. Osborne. They will make themselves another home. Between her, and Isabella, and me, there could be nothing but harsh discord; and peace I must have, be the cost what it will."

"Ay," thought Adèle, "and he will have done with me, too. I, too, shall be cast away," but she said again,—

"And you will have rest, now?"

"Ay, plenty," he carelessly replied. "Mademoiselle de Janson would not be disgusted now at the sound of the forge. It is, or it will soon be, silent. The working-men will find other masters; the rushing water will turn a wheel no more. Its power has been lessening fast of late. I took that as my warning, and I shall never repent having abided by its decision. I am superstitious in this; if Nature pronounces against me, I obey her."

"And you will get rid of Morel?" she said, endeavouring to prolong the discourse.

"He is gone."

"Gone! I am glad of it—I fear traitors."

A smile, beautiful in its irony, played around her husband's lips.

"They are shallow," he said, "to be despised and avoided, if you like, but not to be feared. I say they are shallow. Did that traitor, Morel—did Madame de Launay, who, in her way, is a little bit of a traitress, did they, I say, spite the openness with which I proceeded, so much as suspect my intentions? They did not; the mist of low cunning was on their eyes so that they could not see—and they

did not. They thought, he is unbusiness like, he knows not what he is doing, he is ruining himself, the fool, let him; and to their own cost, to their own sorrow to-day, they did let me go on."

"But what is this to Madame de Launay?" asked Adèle.

Mr. Osborne smiled down at his wife.

"Let her accounts at the end of this year answer the question," he said; "but I do not pity her, she was selfish beyond the law of self-defence—just is the retribution."

Adèle felt sick and faint. She thought how little she had known of her husband, how little, in many respects, she knew of him still. How his suavity, how his courtesy, how his gentleness, concealed depths of strength, of coldness, of will, which she had never sounded; and remembering what was coming, spite of all this delay, her heart sank within her. Mr. Osborne looked at his wife.

"Adèle," he said, "have you nothing to say to me?"

She did not answer. He rose; he was very pale; his lips quivered, and grew thin and white as he spoke, but otherwise he shewed no undue emotion. His look was calm, his voice was even and measured.

"Adèle," he said, "you have succeeded. I had not married you for love, but I loved you. I would not have chosen one so young, but you were as dear to me as are the chosen wives of happy husbands. I have been slow to understand that this affection was a burden and a pain to you; but I see it too clearly now; and I repeat it, you have succeeded.

If you wished for my coldness you have it, and for ever. The affection you show me would satisfy no man, and will certainly not satisfy me. From mine you are henceforth free. Yet we must live in peace and in amity. If you were not so young and so lonely we should separate; but as that is impossible, you must bear with my presence. With more you shall never be troubled. I have not your confidence, I have not your affection. Every effort I have made to earn either has rendered you wretched. I desist; your friend, your protector I am by duty and inclination, but I am no more—you do not wish it—nor do I. I confess it, your caprices have wearied my affection; they have offended my pride; love is cold and dead. I am sorry for you—you are young, and this is a bitter ending to the dreams of youth; for me it does not matter. It is plain I was not meant to be loved of woman, and since I did not know how to shape my destiny better, why I must abide by my lot."

He turned away and left the room.

"Love is cold and dead," said Adèle, looking around her drearily.

This was the old Hall where Mademoiselle de Janson had moaned "that the world was going away." Kneeling on that spot she had for the first time beheld him, and felt the wakening of a lifelong worship in her heart. He was standing there when she gave him her hand and pledged him her life. Sitting by that hearth with him, she had called him her lord and her king; and now he had told her that "love was cold and dead!"

"Dead!" she moaned, "dead!"

She hid her face in her hands. Presently she felt something creeping near her; she looked, and saw Lilian, who gazed up at her wonderingly. With some passion Adèle caught up her husband's child.

"Lilian," she cried, "my heart will break! I have told my trouble to none, and I must tell it to you. He does not love me—he has told me so—he does not love me."

More she could not say; it was the sum, the full-up measure of human misery. She did not hear the opening door; she did not see Mrs. Osborne stand awhile on the threshold, then close the door again, and vanish like a passing vision.

CHAPTER VI.

EMPIRE.

"Love is cold and dead!" In his heart, too, the sad words rang. He looked calm as he uttered them; but there are deep, passionate currents below smooth and still waters. Her pale face haunted him. His own wrath, which he had subdued externally, but which was deep within, followed him like a spectre, and trod in his steps. He crossed the court; he entered the garden, he walked fast; he came unconsciously to the steps that led to the lake; his long-neglected boat lay there waiting for him. At once he leaped in; a few strokes of the oar sent him on the lake. The world and its troubles, life and its cares, seemed left behind. "Nature, balm of all sorrows, soother of all torments," he thought, "blessed be thou ever. Mistress that canst not cloy, pure delight that canst never weary, the few glad hours of a sad life I owe to thee!"

He rowed on; the grey mists rolled along the mountains; chill and white was their aspect. He passed the little town of Nantua, the white dwelling

where Alice had lived. He saw on the opposite shore the grey old church where he had married Adèle, and at length he entered a wilder part of the lake; a silent and solitary little bay where the down of the wild bird floated on the still waters, where long green herbs hung down from the rocks, where the reed rose straight and still, and the white water-lily slept on a glassy bed.

He moored his boat; he leaped on land. The wild delight of liberty and solitude seized and swayed his whole being. He lay down on a mossy rock; he looked at those mists that seemed as if they would fall around him, and wrap him in their cold embrace. His glance wandered over the gloomy little bay shut in by steep mountains; he saw a black speck pass in the grey air above; it was the hawk swaying there for his quarry. He saw a long-legged crane stand in the green waters below, and watch intently for his prey. The sense of a rugged, savage solitude came to him, and with it a rapt and beating heart. Love, marriage, misery, and bliss were forgotten in one divine dream. He was not the manufacturer, he was not the man of business, he was not the husband of Adèle, he was William Osborne the dreamer, the wanderer who went from land to land, unfettered by ties, howsoever sweet, whose will was his law, whose home was every spot where Nature could bless, and man could not intrude.

But the day was worn; evening was falling down on earth and her homes. Mr. Osborne once more crossed the lake, and returned to Courcelles, to life, and all its cares; and all the cares he had left behind

him seemed to come forth to meet him as he entered the garden. With deep and bitter reluctance, with weariness, and pain, he walked up the alley that led to the Manor. His arms were folded, his eyes were downcast, and he was lost in thought; but a gloom passed across the sky, and he felt though he saw it not. He looked up; before him rose the Manor, quiet and grey, and from an upper window smoke dense and dark was pouring; upwards it went, till drifted by the south wind it spread in pale yellow on the sky. Mr. Osborne looked on petrified. The trees swayed gently to the breeze; birds twittered in their boughs; the flowers were closing for the night, and not a sound, not a breath moved the air around the fated dwelling.

But suddenly there arose a piercing cry, then exclamations and shouts followed. "Fire!" resounded everywhere. "Fire!" The whole house grew alive, as if it shielded a multitude. The doors of Mr. Osborne's study and of the conservatory broke open; through one came Mrs. Osborne, Isabella and Anna appeared at the other; the servants rushed out from the low stone arch that led to the court, and all hurried into the garden wild with horror, pale with mute dread. Before any one knew how or whence he had come, Mr. Osborne stood in the very midst of the crowd of terrified faces.

"Where is Adèle?" he cried, vainly looking for her; "where is Lilian?"

No one knew, no one spoke; no one dared to say they were within the burning house.

"Where is Adèle?" he cried again.

There was the same dead silence, and still the dark smoke poured forth from the arched window set in the roof, and in its density there was the glimmer of a tongue of flame, as of a spirit moving in Erebus.

"Good God!" he cried, looking over the whole vast pile; "not to know where?"

"In the room of Madame Lascours," suddenly said Anna.

He bounded up the steps, entered the drawing-room, and was on the staircase, dark and stifling with smoke, in a moment.

"Adèle!" his voice rang through the house; "Adèle! Lilian!"

The smoke poured down thicker, and there was a crackling of wood above. The room of Madame Lascours was on the second floor,—he knew the door, and found it. He entered; Alice was kneeling by her bed, but she was alone.

"Where is Adèle?" he cried.

She did not answer.

"Quick; fly! the house is on fire!"

Vain warning. She did not move, she was senseless. He set his teeth with something between despair and anger; he could not leave her there to perish; but where was Lilian, where was his wife? He seized Madame Lascours and lifted her up; he bore her away; in a few minutes he had placed her on the stone steps where he had found Adèle on the evening of his return. His eye ran rapidly over the group gathered there. He saw Lilian's bonne,

Marie, standing and looking up in stupid terror. He went up to her.

"Where are they?" he said, imperatively.

She stared and replied,—

"I left them in Mademoiselle Lilian's room. I thought they were coming."

Cold sweat gathered on his brow. The smoke still poured out of one window; behind the glass of the next a vivid flame shot up, and that was Lilian's room. For a moment Mr. Osborne looked up with mute, despairing doubt: were they devoured by the fire above? was that fatal smoke stifling them in the staircase?

"Oh, this is horrible!" said Mrs. Osborne.

Even as she spoke the light grew brighter in Lilian's room. The curtains were burning, and behind that sheet of flame Mr. Osborne had a wife and a child. He re-entered the house and vanished.

"Oh, this is horrible!" said Mrs. Osborne again.

No one else spoke. Terror, breathless and deep, had enchanted them all into silence. Madame Lascours had recovered slowly; she sat on the stone steps looking up. Suddenly she veiled her eyes with a low cry; Mr. Osborne was walking on the slanting roof in which, as we have already said, the heavy, round-headed windows of the third floor were set.

He had found it impossible to reach from within the room of Lilian. As he ascended, the smoke drove him back; he had taken another staircase and gone out by a trap-door in one of the garrets on the roof; then a few steps brought him to the window;

he leaped down on the stone balcony that guarded it, and seizing with both hands a hatchet he had found on his way, he gave it a vigorous blow; it yielded with a crash; the shiver of the glass was heard below; out shot the flames, clinging on one side of the stone frame-work, and leaving on the other a gap dark and scorching, in which he vanished; it closed behind him; for a while the bent and broken wood glittered like thin, bright lines on a sombre background, then fell in; thick, magnificent in their fury, the purple flames came pouring out, edged with a keen, vivid blue, and driving and consuming the smoke before them, like a victorious foe his conquered enemy, as they went forth on the air.

By the burning light of the fire, Mr. Osborne saw his wife. She stood at the extreme end of the room, leaning back against the wall like one who could go no further; her arms were thrown around Lilian and held her fast; the terrified child had hidden her face in her stepmother's garments, and clung to her wildly; but with pallid cheeks, and fixed eyes, Adèle looked at the approaching flames.

She saw her husband. With a cry she sprang to him; he threw his right arm around her; in his left he caught up Lilian; but the door resisted him; in her blind, mad terror, Marie had locked it; with one strong effort he burst it open. They ran along a narrow corridor; the hot fire was pressing on them fast; they reached the back staircase; it was safe, but stifling; they descended; the second floor was reached; but dense vapours stopped the way by

which Mr. Osborne had come; they turned aside; they crossed rooms that seemed endless; they were in the court; burning stones from above, hot tiles from the roof, fell thick around them; and now they have entered the narrow passage that leads to the garden; they are in it; the scorching heat of the fire is behind them; above them they see a starry sky; the pure fresh air from mountain and lake meets their faces.

For the first time Mr. Osborne spoke.

"Adèle, are you hurt?" he cried.

"No—no—are you?"

"No—how is Lilian?"

He set down the child. Lilian was still wild with fright, but quite sound. They stood all three, safe and beyond the reach of harm, in the garden.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Adèle, sinking down on her knees on the grass; "thank God!" she said again, as she embraced the child fervently.

Mr. Osborne raised them both, and clasped them to a heart no less grateful that its thanks remained unspoken.

"And Alice and the rest?" she cried, suddenly.

"They are safe. You were the last. What had taken you in the very midst of the fire?"

"I ran up for Lilian; but we both must have died if you had not come to us! a delivering angel."

Her arms were around his neck; fervently she looked up in his face; he put down Lilian, and clasped his wife more closely. He was much moved, not with her last words, which he scarcely heeded, but with those other words which she said so simply:

"I ran up for Lilian." Who else had thought of Lilian?

But their voices had been heard; footsteps came hurrying up the garden alleys; Alice first appeared, pale and silent; then Mrs. Osborne, who outstripped her, rapid and anxious; then Anna, who hung terrified on her still more terrified sister; then the moving, confused group of servants, among them Jean, conspicuously gaunt and trembling.

"This is a great mercy!" said Mrs. Osborne, approaching her stepson. "You have saved them—and you are safe."

"Ah! you are hurt!" cried Adèle.

"A mere scratch," he replied, looking at his hand. A falling stone had grazed it, and it bled profusely. "It is nothing; do not mind it."

They gathered around him; he sat down on a bench; Adèle knelt on the ground at his feet, and staunched the blood with her handkerchief.

"Nothing — nothing!" she repeated, and she looked up at him with a passionate distress which he remembered later.

"It will be nothing," calmly said Mrs. Osborne. "Can nothing be done to stop that fire?" she added, impatiently.

"Nothing," he composedly answered; "it is too high. It will burn a few rooms and exhaust its own fury."

But that fury was a magnificent though terrible sight. The roof was falling in; the flames were streaming up in the quiet sky; they covered its evening purple with a lurid glow; they cast fiery

glimmers on mountain and lake; they filled the garden with a fitful splendour, and gave to the upraised faces of the helpless lookers-on a strange spectral look. Mr. Osborne admired the gorgeous spectacle, but his stepmother's step sounded quick and impatient in the gravelled alley, as she walked up and down; there was a flush on her cheek and a frown on her brow, and she at length exclaimed:

"William, I must give a few orders, with your permission."

"Certainly," he said.

Scarcely waiting for his reply, she turned to the servants.

"Mathieu, take a boat and go to Nantua; ask for the engines. Jean, run and call the men from the mill; Marie, no you are too stupid with fear, you, Justine, will do better, run and fetch Docteur Guillaume. Quick—Begone."

They flew at her authoritative voice; Mr. Osborne smiled, and said:

"To-morrow would have done for Docteur Guillaume; there are no men at the mill; the fire will be out before Mathieu has reached Nantua. Look at those flames, Adèle."

She had bound his hand, and she was sitting by him. With a shudder she hid her face against him, and replied:

"I cannot look."

But Lilian, now much recovered, climbed up on the bench to see better.

"Oh, how it burns!" she cried, "how it burns!"

Mr. Osborne laid his injured hand on the shoulder of his wife, and kissed Lilian's cheek.

"Let it burn," he said, philosophically; "the King need not care much for the palace when he has saved the jewels of the crown."

Mrs. Osborne bit her lip to repress a sharp remark at what she considered his supineness, but the event justified his clear-sightedness.

Within half-an-hour the fire was over, and no aid had come. Through broad gaps in the roof there still rose a murky vapour, that dimmed the crescent moon, but fire and flame had sunk back in the crater of the abyss, and the Manor rose before them, scorched, blackened, with sunken roof and round holes instead of the upper windows, but with solid basement, with walls still ready to defy the might of time, strong as any rock-built citadel.

Mrs. Osborne looked at it and did not see it; the fire, the havoc, the loss, troubled her not. She pondered over those words she had overheard, "He does not love me." "Of course he does not," thought Mrs. Osborne, looking at Adèle, who still sat by her husband. "He is not the man to love a woman. Intellect in him ever keeps passion chained, and pride ever curbs fondness. You have tried him, a man, too far. He is lost, estranged, and never will he return to you. Never—never, for all that passionate look which he gave back so coldly. Like images in a dream, the wife who could not keep his fondness, the brother who could not keep his trust, the sister who could not keep his liking, have passed athwart his life. They have left him what he was a

year ago ; the cold dreamer, the suffering, weary man. He hates me, he mistrusts me, and through that very hate and that mistrust I have prevailed so far that I am still his father's widow whom he must respect, whom he must dismiss with a show of courtesy. Go! I will not go—my hour is come, as their hour has passed. I will stay, and I will rule him."

And as the group was breaking up, she went to her step-son, and taking him away a few steps in an alley, she said, impressively,—

"William, I cannot leave to morrow, under these circumstances. I wish to suggest no possible evil, but your wife looks ill—quite ill. Take my advice, make her rest, rest yourself, and leave all the managing to me. In a week, in ten days, I shall go as we agreed this morning. Isabella's peace of mind requires it. To keep her here would be barbarous. I have no wish to stay myself."

She spoke with great seeming candour. He glanced at his wife, and half in conviction, half in courtesy, Mr. Osborne accepted her offer.

Mrs. Osborne at once entered on her duties—so far as it was possible in the absence of Jeannette, who was out, and had the keys in her pocket.

Jeannette had a married niece who lived in one of the valleys around Courcelles. Jeannette rarely saw her; her niece had half-a-dozen children to mind, and Jeannette had a world of things to do in Courcelles, which no one else could possibly accomplish. But on the day when Adèle was to go to Mérigny, it occurred to Jeannette that she too could indulge in a promenade, and though that projected journey

was relinquished, Jeannette did not for this give up her plans. She went, remained the whole day out, and returned when night was fairly set in.

The road was lonely, but a pale moon lit it; Jeannette, moreover, had a brave heart, and knew not fear. She walked on sturdily, not minding the bushes and the clefts on her right, or the lake on her left, until the turning of the road brought her in view of the Manor of Courcelles.

"My sight is getting bad," thought Jeannette, rubbing her eyes, "and I cannot see the roof."

She looked again and again; but still the roof was invisible, and at length Jeannette was obliged to conclude that her eyes were all right, but that the roof was all wrong. She did not stop to wonder about it, she ran on, and reached, amazed and breathless, the entrance door, by which Jean stood, holding Docteur Guillaume's little horse.

"Monsieur Jean!" she cried, in the tone of an adjuration, "what has happened to the roof of the house?"

"Burned down—down to the ground!" groaned Jean. He belonged to the popular class of alarmists.

"I shall never believe that," said Jeannette, resolutely, "there is a prophecy against it. Courcelles cannot burn. The English tried it; the Huguenots tried it; and the Revolutionists tried it; and Courcelles would not burn. Besides, do I not see it there before me?" she added, as if the visible fact were only the confirmation of the prophecy.

"I never saw anything burn like that third story,"

groaned Jean, "it lit up the whole country as with the bonfires of Midsummer's night. Monsieur has all but lost his arm. He and Docteur Guillaume say it is a scratch; but for my part I think amputation the only safe course. I have always understood that when limbs are not amputated in time, mortification follows."

"You do not mean to say that anything has happened to Mamzelle Adèle?" gasped Jeannette.

"She would have been burned but for Monsieur," replied Jean, with doleful triumph; "but, thank God! we have had no disaster save Monsieur's arm, and that is bad enough," he added.

A burst of tears of joy, and of moans of horror, partly relieved Jeannette. Next followed the strange but emphatic declaration—

"Monsieur Jean, Morel, the wretch, is at the bottom of this. He has an old grudge against our little mistress, and he is at the bottom of it."

"But he is gone, Mademoiselle Jeannette."

"He went to hide his game; but I have no more time to lose. Let me in. A pretty mess they have made of it in my absence."

Jeannette entered, all eagerness to act, all anxiety to do everything and be all things in a moment; but she found a person who had already assumed the task, and who seemed much more disposed to order Jeannette about than to stand or sit still while she should be doing. Mrs. Osborne had seized on the reins of domestic authority, and she grasped them with a tight and vigorous hand.

The ground-floor and the first story had not suf-

fered from the fire, but the bed-rooms, though probably untouched, were not to be approached, and the whole house was in disorder. Mrs. Osborne was in the Hall with her daughters; she was as active and energetic as they were listless. Isabella sat by a table, with her elbow leaning upon it, and a look that implied, once the fright of the thing over, she cared very little whether the house was burned or not. Anna sat back in a chair, and moaned. She had been compelled to leave her room precipitately; she had caught her death of cold in the garden; and it was very cruel and very selfish to have a fire in the house when she was in that state of health.

"Will that provoking old woman never come?" indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, looking at her watch.

And the provoking old woman, who was no other than Jeannette, opened the door, and entered the apartment, thinking to find her young mistress there.

Mrs. Osborne drew herself up, and looked amazed and majestic.

"Oh, you have returned!" she said, frigidly; "another time I beg you will have the goodness not to take the keys of the store-room with you. Go at once, and fetch the requisite number of blankets and sheets; tell Justine that dinner ought to have been served up ten minutes ago, and that if she does not recover her wits, I shall send her away to-morrow morning. Where is Jean, that he is not bringing down the couches from up-stairs as I told him? Well, what is the woman standing there and staring for?"

"If you please, Madame," coolly said Jeannette, "I shall go and speak with my mistress, Madame Osborne. Perhaps she, too, has some orders to give me. As to the keys," rapidly added Jeannette, "if I keep them, it is because my mistress, Madame Osborne, tells me to do so."

In vain Mrs. Osborne drew herself up, and crushed Jeannette with a look of her blue eyes. The old servant had the true instinct of war in her. In the sudden authority assumed by Mrs. Osborne she saw the dawn of a domestic revolution likely to upset the legitimate authority of Adèle.

"It is not because the roof of the house is burned that she is going to have her way," thought Jeannette; and without troubling herself with Justine or Jean, she went at once to Mr. Osborne's study. There, as she had ascertained from Marie, whom she had met and scolded on the way, she was to find Adèle. But Adèle was in her husband's room, and in the study there was no one save Mr. Osborne himself and Docteur Guillaume, who was dressing the injured limb Jean so earnestly desired to see amputated.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Osborne, rather shortly, for Jeannette had entered without knocking.

"I came to take Madame's orders," stoutly said Jeannette.

"Go to my stepmother. Your mistress is in bed and must not be disturbed. You think nothing of that fever of hers, do you?" he added, addressing Doctor Guillaume.

"Nothing at all; she has been frightened, that is

all," was the brief reply. "Jeannette, just hold your master's arm, will you."

Jeannette obeyed, Mr. Osborne pursued—

"Her health has not been good of late; do you not advise total repose?"

"Certainly, and especially no annoyance, no emotion. There, you may go now," he added, addressing Jeannette.

She withdrew, deeply disgusted with Mr. Osborne. "She has had her way," she thought, "she has had her way."

Resistance being useless, she submitted to Mrs. Osborne, and produced, as desired, the sheets and the blankets, and justice compels us to add, what Jeannette would never have acknowledged, that sagacity, prudence, and decision characterized Mrs. Osborne's proceedings. Within an hour beds were ready everywhere, and a tolerable dinner even appeared on the table. Mr. Osborne, who wore his arm in a sling, complimented his stepmother.

"You would make an excellent commissariat," he said.

"I am happy to have been able to supply the place of our dear Adèle," graciously replied Mrs. Osborne.

"Ay, you perfidious serpent," thought Jeannette, who was waiting at table; Jean's mind had been found unequal to the task.

"I hope she will be well to-morrow," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "William, are you not sitting down with us?"

"Docteur Guillaume recommends low diet, but I

am happy to see you so well provided. Good night."

"Good night, my dear William," most graciously said his stepmother; "pray tell Adèle not to trouble herself with anything; to leave everything to me."

"I am so much obliged to you," said Mr. Osborne; "she is very unwell, and Docteur Guillaume recommends rest."

He left the room.

"It is a conspiracy against my poor lamb," groaned Jeannette; "a vile conspiracy!"

But it was a conspiracy which she resolved to defeat by a warning appeal to its destined victim. The opportunity offered itself the very next morning.

It was late when Adèle awoke after a feverish night, during which she had ever seen her husband sitting by her, watching patiently, but he was gone now, and she thought herself alone, until a light sound made her look round; she saw Alice standing at the head of her bed, quiet and grave. She bent over her, and asked how she was.

"I am well, thank you; I shall get up."

Alice assisted her to rise and to dress, without summoning Madame Leroy, who, like Jean, was unwell with fright.

"You have seen him this morning?" suddenly said Adèle; "how did he look?"

"He looked well."

There was another pause, then Adèle, sitting down on the edge of the bed, spoke again:

"Alice, did I not warn you the fire had broken out as I passed by your room — or did I dream it?"

"You did not dream, you warned me, but I fainted with cowardly dread. Mr. Osborne came looking for you, I believe, and found me senseless. I awoke safe in the garden, thanks to him. Even in that, you see, I could not help being a trouble and a burden."

"So was I."

"Oh, no; your husband says much of your calmness and courage."

Adèle showed no emotion; he might speak well of her, he might have saved her life, he might have sat up with her all night. What matter—she knew he was estranged, for all that.

The morning was fine, and Adèle said she should like to walk in the garden. She went out with Alice, and cast a long apathetic look at the blackened and broken line of roof that disfigured the Manor. She met Lilian in one of the alleys, and she gave the child, for whose life she had risked her own, a cold embrace. At length she sat down listlessly in one of the arbours, and answered her companion with monosyllables, until all conversation became at a standstill. They had not been silent long when Mrs. Osborne came up and affectionately kissed her daughter-in-law.

"My dearest, how are you?" she said tenderly; "William gives sad accounts of you."

"Does he?" said Adèle, surprised.

"He does not seem to feel his arm at all," pur-

sued Mrs. Osborne; "he is now exploring what I may call the ruins."

Adèle turned pale.

"You do not mean to say that he is gone upstairs!" she cried.

"My dear, there is no danger; he is prudent; he studied architecture in his youth; my dear, where are you going?"

Adèle was not going, she was gone. She had risen as if by magic; she ran down the alley, she entered the house, she vanished, all in a moment.

"Ah! Madame!" cried Alice, much alarmed, "what have you done! I knew where Monsieur Osborne was, but I did not tell her."

"Allow me to say you were wrong," quietly replied Mrs. Osborne, "her presence may restrain him; my representations failed; hers may prevail."

Alice, who had risen to follow Adèle, sat down again:

"I am anxious about Adèle," pursued Mrs. Osborne, "and so is her husband. Her health is not good. Doctor Guillaume recommends a repose incompatible with the cares of a household. Do you know, my dear Madame Lascours, I cannot help thinking that you, who are so old a friend of hers, ought to relieve her for awhile from this heavy responsibility."

"I!" cried Alice, much startled, "and why not you, Madame?"

Mrs. Osborne smiled gently.

"William has asked me; but I may say to you what I cannot say to him: Adèle might think that I was seeking to usurp. Whereas, with you—"

"No—no—I cannot," interrupted Madame Lascours; "I am not of the family; I cannot—I must not."

"I am sorry you view it in that light," said Mrs. Osborne; "allow me," she added, taking her arm and leading her down an alley, "allow me to argue the matter with you."

Mr. Osborne had gone up through the drawing-room; he had reached the second floor without trouble; but there began the region of havoc and peril; still he went on; he came to the room of Adèle, it had escaped as by miracle; her work still lay on the table, her glove had remained on a chair; all was untouched, unharmed. Mr. Osborne left the room, locked the door, and attempted to proceed; but hot and shattered floors under his feet; above his head a roof that let in the sky; around him rent walls blackened with the smoke that still lingered in the abyss below, warned him not to proceed. He stood looking, measuring with his eye the extent of the ruin, when suddenly he was conscious of a presence; before he could look round, Adèle stood by him on that insecure floor, divided only by a few paces from the dark gap.

"What brought you up here?" he asked, very much displeased. "How could you be so imprudent!"

Her cheeks were burning—her eyes were bright with fever; she smiled at his question, which she did not answer.

"You wanted to see your room," he pursued;

"well, it has escaped, but you cannot see it; you must not stay here; the place is not safe."

He took her arm and led her down; but he considered the garden too warm for her; he accordingly took her to the Hall, and there he left her with his two sisters.

Isabella sat by a window, absorbed in gloomy and sullen meditation; Anna was taking her breakfast alone, and looked crossly at her sister-in-law.

"I went to your room to bid you good-bye," she said; "I thought you were so ill—I had my trouble for nothing."

"You are going," said Adèle, sinking down listlessly on a chair.

"Yes, I am. I told William I would not stay in a burning house, so he said I might go to Mérigny and have the house he had taken for you; but he says you must not come with me."

"Will not Isabella?" asked Adèle.

"I!" disdainfully replied Isabella. "What should I go to Mérigny for?"

"Will not Mrs. Osborne?"

"Mamma," crossly replied Anna, "is too busy here. It seems you are so ill, you can attend to nothing, and William has asked mamma to take care of the house, and so she cannot come."

Adèle looked both uninterested and unmoved; but her natural kindness induced her to say:

"You may take Madame Leroy, if you like; Jeannette will do for me, and Madame Leroy was disappointed, I know, at remaining behind."

Anna relaxed considerably, and thought she did

like; but could not help reproaching Isabella for her unsisterly conduct, which she contrasted with the kindness of Adèle. The only answer of Isabella, was—

"What should I go to Mérigny for?"

"If you were like Adèle," began Anna.

Adèle did not wait to hear the rest; she stole out of the room. She longed for silence, for solitude, for peace. The garden might be warm, but a quiet alley, even though it were sunburnt, was all she now wished for. Her desire was not to be gratified. She had not walked ten steps towards the maze, when she met Jeannette. The old woman went up to her, and said resolutely,—

"I have been looking for Madame the whole morning. Madame must be so good as to give me a few orders. Madame need not take any trouble; she need only say, 'do it,' and it shall be done."

"Speak to your master," replied Adèle.

Jeannette knew this would lead to a reference to Mrs. Osborne, she stoutly said,—

"Madame is my mistress."

"Speak to your master," replied Adèle, again.

"Monsieur hates the trouble."

"Then speak to Mrs. Osborne."

This was a blow, but Jeannette did not give in.

"The fire has upset Madame," she said, "but what about it? Monsieur will repair Courcelles, and Madame's great grandchildren will live and die in it yet. But, in the meanwhile, Madame must rouse herself. That Madame Osborne is coming creeping like a cat. They must not have their way

too much with Monsieur. They must not take away the management of the house from Madame—I say they must not. Madame Osborne is carrying it with a high hand; I say she must not be allowed to go on."

"I would not raise my finger to check her," said Adéle, moodily.

"But she shall not have her way, nor Mademoiselle Isabella, either," persisted Jeannette; "I declare they both came and counted the blankets last night over me. Did they think I was a thief?"

But Adèle remained unmoved, and utterly indifferent.

"What do I care?" she said; "let them rule the house from the garret to the cellar—what do I care!"

"Madame must care. It is her husband—it is her house. Madame must care."

Adèle smiled, for she thought, "He is my husband no more;—the house is his, not mine. Let me but have a corner in it, and I am content."

In vain Jeannette tried to rouse her. Pride and ambition were dead in her heart.

"They have broken her spirit," groaned Jeannette; "they have conquered."

"*They*," thought Adèle, "oh, no—not they. If I had but him, I would defy them all."

But she looked rather coldly in Jeannette's face, and said, gravely,

"You surprise me. What do you mean?"

"Ah, Madame, where is the use of hiding from me. You will only break your poor little heart."

"Jeannette!"

"Madame, do you remember the history of Mademoiselle de Courcelles? No—well then, let me tell it to you. Pray do."

Adèle did not answer.

"When she lived I do not know, but she was a rich lady, and a beautiful one. She was reared by a married sister, whose brother-in-law fell in love with her and she with him; but he was destined to the church. They were parted in great wrath, and it was some time before they met again, at the court of, I know not what queen. He was not a priest, but a marquis, and a man of the world; he had but to ask in order to have her, but he did not. He looked at her as if he had never seen her before; she was just as proud, for she had a high spirit. She looked gay and merry, and happy, and did not mind him, and at length he went away. He said not a word, nor did she. But when he was fairly gone she broke into moans and cries of grief. Nothing ailed her but this lamenting, which in a few days took her to her grave. They were burying her, when a gentleman, who was entering the city, saw the white bier and flowers, and asked the name of the dead girl. They told him, upon which he gave a great cry, and dropping from his horse, expired on the spot. It was her lover come back to be forgiven."

"Well, Jeannette, what about that story?" asked Adèle, very gravely.

"Ah, Madame, if you are so silent and so proud your heart will break as hers broke, not with the grief, perhaps, but with the concealment."

"What a dreamer you are, Jeannette," said Adèle, smiling, "yet your story is pretty, though so sad. Only the lady's name was not Courcelles, but De Tournon; and the lover did not die, Jeannette. I have read it all in one of Monsieur Osborne's books. It happened at the court of the Queen of Navarre, and the lover recovered and married, and forgot his first love."

Jeannette looked at her mistress very earnestly; but Adèle bore the look firmly. She had made to his child one passionate complaint; after this she had locked up her heart, and vowed that no human being should look down its bitter depths, or so much as catch a glimpse of its agony. She gave Jeannette another look and walked away.

Jeannette stood for awhile in the path, then said aloud, and with some solemnity,—

"I must meddle."

CHAPTER VII.

JEANNETTE.

ANNA went to Mérigny: Isabella did not utter ten words from morning until bedtime; Mr. Osborne was busy repairing Courcelles, and apparently absorbed in the task; Mrs. Osborne kindly gave up her intended departure, and ruled house and servants, and was steadily creeping, as Jeannette said, to unlimited authority; and Alice stayed day after day in the vain hope of solacing one who would not be solaced. Adèle was both humble and proud, and her love partook of that humility, and of that pride.

The humility of women who love may take two aspects. A woman may be humble, because she is a woman, and acknowledge in the man who has chosen her, a being nobler than herself. Her humility is that of one sex to the other. It is painful, for it strikes at the very root of love. If woman is inferior to man she is not worthy of him. It is degradation in him to love her; it is folly in her to love a higher creature whose feelings she can never hope to partake.

There is another humility which should never be mistaken for this—it is the acknowledgment born of love that she who loves can never be good, or beautiful, or accomplished enough for the loved one—the humility of worship that delights in its own personal abasement to one object. That, too, may go too far, but its source is touching and not degrading. "I never can be worthy of you," it says, "yet we are of one nature. I never can be all that you are, but I can share your feelings, and be a partaker of your hopes. No pitiless barrier of different kind, of natural inferiority divides and torments us—you by the knowledge that you move alone on earth, I by the feeling, that though I should strive for ever, I never can read you."

It is a humility that rests on the knowledge that when God gave man a companion, he poured the same divine spirit into the frailer form. He denied it much that man has, and bestowed on it much that man has not. He established an external difference of qualities which cannot be violated without impunity, but no inferiority of nature.

These were not subjects on which Adèle speculated much; but this she felt, that if as Adèle she could never be worthy of the love of a man whom she admired and loved infinitely, yet as a woman she might have had that love in its fulness. As Adèle she was humble, and as a woman and a wife she was proud. He had pronounced an unjust and a hard sentence; she submitted to it without a word of murmur because it was unjust. She did nothing to soften, nothing to charm him. She had made the effort once, but then

she did not love him. No woman who loves can try and charm a cold man. Passion has vehement reproaches, eloquent bitterness, or scornful, silent pride, but no arts, no seductions to win back a lost or estranged heart.

Adèle was calm and gentle with her husband; she did not look the reproaches she did not speak. She did not hint what she would not say openly. She was grateful when he was kind; she confessed she was not quite well, and submitted with great docility to the quietness Dr. Guillaume prescribed. She showed no displeasure because Mrs. Osborne reigned in the house; she betrayed and she felt no jealousy when Mr. Osborne and Alice were together. Jealousy was dead, like his love; grief had conquered and slain it. She had never imputed wrong to her husband or to her friend. The thought of harm could not come near Alice, and he was incapable of a baseness. She had only thought that he admired Alice more than he admired her; that if he had been free he would have taken Alice and left her by. She thought this, and it was very bitter; and now she thought nothing at all. She had lost his affection; they were divided; they lived in one house; she bore his name; but she was his wife no more. How, then, could she be jealous? It would have been foolish and childish—it was impossible.

And thus matters went on; and though this mute sorrow was wasting her away, with a rapidity that tormented Mr. Osborne so much, that he could scarcely bear to see her, feeling, as he did, that he

had done it, and could not undo it, and that even if he could, her strange caprices would make him do it again; though we say Adèle was sinking rapidly, Jeannette either could not make up her mind, or she could not find the opportunity for that interference, which was to work such wonders.

One afternoon, indeed, she did make up her mind, and, meeting Mr. Osborne in the garden, she was going to address him and take him roundly to task for breaking the heart of his poor little wife, when her kind intent was frustrated by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Osborne. Jeannette walked into a neighbouring alley, and stayed there, and we are sorry to say listened. A thick hedge did not allow her to hear all; but she heard plenty to make her blood boil.

"My dear William, I want more money, if you please. If you will look at my accounts—"

Mr. Osborne, who hated accounts, interrupted her to ask how much she wanted. Jeannette did not hear the reply, but she remembered with a groan that Adèle had never touched a five-franc piece of her husband's money since his return. "She has got the purse, and she will keep it," she thought.

"My dear William," urged Mrs. Osborne, again, "can you, with your mind, think of burying yourself here? Think of Lilian, too. Her large fortune requires a brilliant education, which cannot be had here. Why not sell Courcelles, and settle in Paris?"

"Sell Courcelles!" thought Jeannette, "and break my darling's heart. Oh! the serpent."

She had not the consolation of hearing Mr. Osborne's reply; for he said in English—Mrs. Osborne had used French:—

"I should not like to sell Courcelles, if it were only on account of Adèle, who loves the place."

"Very true," replied Mrs. Osborne, using English likewise, to Jeannette's infinite mortification; "very true—and her mind is in that delicate, tender state—pray do not look alarmed; but you know she is of a strange, irritable, wayward family."

Mr. Osborne was too much affected at this hint to reply, and with this Parthian shaft his stepmother left him. Mr. Osborne remained absorbed in thought. Jeannette, trembling with wrath at these two facts which she had gathered—Mrs. Osborne had got the purse; Mrs. Osborne had proposed to part with Courcelles—left her hiding place, and waylaid her master. He was walking up an alley that led to the Manor; his arms were folded; his eyes were downcast; yet he saw her, and at once stopped short.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked. He put the question for the purpose of shunning his wife. He felt no anger against her, but a sad displeasure that made her aspect painful to him. It so happened that Jeannette could answer his question.

"Madame is in her room," she said, "lying on her bed."

"What ails her?" he asked.

Jeannette shook her head.

"It is not easy to say what ails Madame," she said. "They have always been an odd family."

Mr. Osborne looked thoughtful. He had always considered Mademoiselle de Janson of unsound mind. Was it possible that insanity pervaded the family of his wife? Could it be that the strangeness of Adèle proceeded from so sad a source? It sickened him to think of it. With a vivacity and a sharpness of which he was not conscious, he said to Jeannette:

"You have been long in the family; what hereditary complaint is there in it?"

"A hereditary complaint!" indignantly exclaimed Jeannette, "none that I know of save stubbornness and pride."

"What did my wife's mother die of?" he persisted, his suspicions strengthened.

Jeannette gave him a sad, stern look.

"Madame de Courcelles," she said, "died of the complaint of which her mother had died before her, and it is the saddest complaint a woman can have. She died of a broken heart because she had a bad husband; her mother died of the same disease, because she had a good one—my young master, who died of a bad fall from his horse. Monsieur de Courcelles, who was the father of my young mistress, Madame Osborne, was killed in a duel, by the husband of a lady whom he liked better than his own wife. They have always been a bad, wicked race," added Jeannette, "but their only illnesses were those brought on by their own wicked will."

Mr. Osborne did not insist; he looked as if he would move on.

Jeannette altered her tone, and said:

"As to the illness of Madame—that is quite

another thing. Monsieur knows as well as I do what ails her."

Mr. Osborne paused in the act of moving, and fastened a piercing look on Jeannette's face; but he gave her no encouragement to proceed.

"If I thought Monsieur did not know," hesitatingly pursued Jeannette, "and that Madame would never learn it, I would tell him."

"You are to repeat nothing of what your mistress says to you," said Mr. Osborne, coldly, "not even to me."

"As if she had said anything to me," echoed Jeannette. "Why, she would die first. Ah! I have not forgotten when she was a little girl, and cut her foot by running, spite all I had told her, in the little brook in the orchard—Mademoiselle Adèle always had odd fancies. Ah! I have not forgotten that I found it out a week afterwards, by the stains of blood on her little white stocking, poor angel! Tell me anything, indeed! Even when I found her moaning on these very steps the other night, all she told me was to bid me hold my tongue, and never come near her again."

There is no denying that Mr. Osborne's curiosity was strangely roused; but pride, stronger than curiosity, would allow him to put no question. He walked on, Jeannette followed him.

"Ah, sir," she said, "do not be angry with me. I am but a servant; but remember that I received Mademoiselle Adèle in my arms when she was born, and that I love her like my own flesh and blood. For Heaven's sake do not despise because it comes

from old Jeannette, a warning that may save my dear young mistress a world of misery."

"I know you are a faithful servant, Jeannette," said Mr. Osborne, "and you are mistaken in supposing I should despise the words of a woman who reared my wife."

"Ay, but you will not ask what it is," a little indignantly thought Jeannette.

"Say what you have to say," pursued Mr. Osborne, "but be quick, I am in a hurry."

But Jeannette on being put to the proof, could not find her tongue. Mr. Osborne frowned.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, impatiently.

"Madame has a complaint which she will never tell a doctor," hesitatingly said Jeannette, "and for which all the waters of Mérigny would not have done her much good."

"I do not read riddles," frigidly said Mr. Osborne; "you must speak plainly, or not at all."

Jeannette wrung her hands, and seemed strangely perturbed. At length it came out.

"Madame is fond of her husband," said Jeannette, reddening at having to talk of such things.

Mr. Osborne showed no sort of emotion. Jeannette saw this would not do. She closed her eyes and gasped forth,—

"And unfortunately Madame—Madame is jealous."

Mr. Osborne stood still like one enchanted; a burning glow overspread his whole face, but Jeannette did not see it. Without looking at him she turned into an alley and walked away.

Jealous! strange to say he had never for a moment thought of that, he had perplexed conjecture with wild and improbable imaginations; he had never questioned it concerning this truth. Jealous! she whom he had loved with strong and entire affection! Jealous of Alice, too! she whom, spite all her faults, he thought infinitely more attractive than Alice, with all her virtues. She whom even as her impartial friend he had admired with respect, but with tenderness too; she whom, as her husband, he had loved with a man's pride as well as with a lover's fondness. It was incredible, yet a hundred proofs thronged memory and confirmed it.

He felt touched, disturbed, offended, and mollified too, in a moment. Her doubt offended him in his honour, her humility in his taste and his affection, but even when his wrath was rising, he remembered that this jealousy was the child of infinite love; his anger fell as strong winds grow still on summer noons; the sins of his wife fled from his memory, and keen, vivid, reproachful, his own rose and arraigned him, each a separate conscience, severe and upbraiding. Forbearance failing when it was most needed, duty perverted into harshness, love wronged by passionate denials became his accusers and his judges. He heard them all humbly enough, and offered but one plea. "I have been pitiless, but when have I not loved her first and entirely?" And even as the thought rose within him she turned the angle of a path and stood before him in hesitating attitude, like one who knows that she shall not please by staying, yet who fears to offend by passing on.

He did not wish to explain, he did not wish to question; he did not wish for a scene, even a love scene; he did not want to make or receive reproaches, however tender; he loved, indeed, but he was a husband, and he had, like most men, strong ideas of a man's dignity and a husband's rights. Adèle was the darling of his heart, but she was his wife, too. He could not and he would not woo what he possessed, and especially when that being whom he owned loved him; but neither could he let that bitterness and that cloud remain one moment longer between them. He laid his hand on her shoulder, he looked down in her face conscious of his power indeed, yet humbly too.

"Adèle," he began.

She raised her finger, and smiled.

"Do not," she replied: "I know what you mean; it was my fault; I tried you too far."

He still looked down at her, very much surprised and very much moved at being read so soon and so quickly forgiven.

"I do believe you are one of the best of little girls," he said.

"Do not praise me," she exclaimed, looking alarmed, "or I shall straight do something wrong."

"If a man could say more than 'I am sorry' when he has erred," pursued Mr. Osborne, still looking at her, "I would not be niggardly in professions of regret, but I can find no better words than the plain words; no surer bond for the future than true sorrow for the past."

"I tell you it was all my fault," she cried, "I tried your patience too much."

"Child! what patience is that which will not bear the trial?" he asked, with some sadness. "Do you think that when I married you I thought myself wedded to sunshine and dew—I did not. I knew that marriage is holy and stainless, a sacrament in the church, a grave ordinance in society; I knew that, instituted by God in Eden, when man was sinless and woman had not been tempted, it had survived the Fall and the Curse, the only gift of Heaven, from which the blessing has never been taken away; yes, all this I knew, but I knew, too, that infirmity is the name of woman, spite all her tenderness and her beauty; I knew that weakness is the name of man, spite all his strength and his native greatness. I prepared myself to endure as well as to love—to forbear as well as to cherish. Vain preparation! trifles have exasperated me, things so slight that I scarcely remember them could make me forget the generous indulgence of the man for the wayward nature of the woman, and the courtesy of the gentleman for the lady."

"Do not speak so," she said, "you pain me. I tell you again I tried you too much; but now I shall be good, truly good. Oh, you will see!"

She spoke with her old childish ardour, and in her eagerness she seized his hand and pressed it between both her own.

"You are the best of little girls," he said, again, "but if I were to ask you to go to Mérigny—"

" But you will not," she interrupted, with a secure smile, on which followed a joyous laugh.

Strange change ! yet not more strange than complete ; her eyes had their old light ; her cheek had its early bloom ; she looked a little worn, perhaps, but no more.

" Strange little creature," he said, smiling ; " well, where are you running away ? Are you not coming up stairs with me ?"

Adèle was already at some distance from him ; she turned round gaily.

" By and bye," she said, " by and bye."

She allowed him to ascend alone the steps that led to the conservatory, and thence to the saloon. She entered that room adjoining her husband's study, which had now become her room. She wanted to be glad alone, to rejoice for a moment in the fulness of her heart. She sank down on a chair ; she surrendered herself to a strange, tumultuous joy. Mr. Osborne was one of those men who say things once or twice in a life time, and hold fast by them for ever ; yet complete had been his retractation, complete in aspect as well as in speech ; never had he looked at her with more friendly affection than he had looked at her a quarter of an hour before in the garden. His aspect expressed not half so much penitence as tenderness, deep and true ; penitence would have moved her, " but not like that," thought Adèle, " not like that."

She started up. She was romantic, not sentimental. She had keen, ardent feelings, but she could not linger over emotion, and even through all

her joy there now shot a feminine feeling. "How do I look?" The glass gave response: she looked well.

The wish of paying some attention to her toilet awoke after a week's slumber. She smoothed her hair; she gave her attire a new aspect; she would have liked to metamorphose her whole being. Having done all she could she ran up to the saloon —for the last three evenings she had not been seen there.

Evening had set in; the chandelier was lit; the windows were open; a balmy breeze, perfumed with the flowers from the conservatory, filled the room. At the further end, sitting by the window they liked, Adèle saw Alice and her husband. In a moment, without power or thought of resistance on her part, jealousy returned and filled her heart. It had fled when the deeper grief had come, and now that grief was gone it returned triumphant.

She sat down breathless near the door. At once Mrs. Osborne was by her.

"I am so glad," she murmured. "How well you look! I have heard from Anna. Do you know, I do not think the waters of Mérigny would have done you much good. They so often affect the wrong nerves. My sister-in-law—I mean my first husband's sister—went to Mérigny for a pain in her side. Would you believe that she lost the use of an eye?"

"How fortunate!" replied Adèle, looking at her husband, who had not seen her.

"Fortunate, my dear! I am telling you that she

lost the use of an eye—of her right eye—no, by the way, it was the left."

"How sad!" said Adèle.

Mr. Osborne had seen her, but continued his discourse with Alice.

"Sad for her, indeed; for the consequence of this change in her personal attractions—she had had beautiful eyes—was that her husband's love lessened, and finally vanished. What is it, my dear?"

It was Isabella who somewhat imperiously claimed her mother's attention. She said a few words which Adèle did not heed; Mrs. Osborne rose, and with an apology left her daughter-in-law.

Mr. Osborne was incapable of the ungenerous and ungentlemanlike weakness of wilfully exciting his wife's jealousy; but the opportunity he had not sought came; he saw Adèle look at him and Alice very strangely, and he could not resist the craving desire of knowing how far the rebellious girl who had wished herself dead a month after their marriage was now at his mercy. He spoke to Alice, but he looked in a side way she could not detect or observe at his wife. He saw her lend a divided attention to his stepmother's speech, whilst her eyes never left him and her friend; he could even read on her troubled face, vainly smiling, the torment of one who hears with thoughts far away from hearing words that sound distant and dull. But Mrs. Osborne was called away; Adèle remained alone by the table near which she sat. She leaned her elbow on it; her hand shaded her brow, but not her fixed intent eyes. Her other hand turned the pages of the book

of engravings, and once he saw it fall listlessly by her side, and he saw, or imagined that he saw—for the room was large, and they were not very near—her pale lips quiver, and something pass over her whole aspect like a silent despair.

And what did he feel then? Was it gratified love or gratified pride? Perhaps it was something partaking of both—something between tenderness and revenge that made it sweeter to be thus despairingly loved when he had grown estranged and cold, than when he first poured forth all his fondness at the feet of a careless and wayward heart. He had grown suddenly silent; Madame Lascours spoke; he did not hear, he did not answer. She gave him a surprised glance; she saw him look at his pale wife, whose averted face remained unconscious of the look. Alice saw his dark eyes beaming with triumph and exultation; she saw the light but unusual glow on his cheek, the proud and happy smile that played around his handsome mouth, and with a beating heart, through which there ran a thrill of pain that was neither jealousy nor love, but the memory of both, she, too, read a story she had not read before.

"I believe you were speaking?" said Mr. Osborne, whose ear now recollected the sounds it had not heeded; and he turned to her, still smiling.

Alice, too, smiled, and looked up at him sadly. "I thought you generous," she thought, "and you are not. The man who likes to torment what he loves is still strong in you."

"I was saying," she observed, aloud, "that Adèle looks very ill to-night."

A sudden cloud passed over his face; with a troubled and half-repentant aspect he turned towards the spot where his wife sat, but her chair by the table was vacant. Unable to bear more, she had left the room. Alice rose.

"Excuse me," she said to Mr. Osborne, "I have not seen Adèle to-day. I wish to speak to her."

He let her go. "She must know all—once for all she must know it," thought Madame Lascours. She went to the room of Adèle, but it was vacant; she looked in the Hall, but Adèle was not there; she returned to the drawing-room, and found no one there save Isabella sitting sullen, silent, and alone. "She, too, has her cross to bear," thought Madame Lascours, resuming her place; "who has not, on this sad earth—who has not? They who might be blest seek their own torment. Where is Adèle now? mourning for imaginary sorrows!"

Adèle was in the garden lying on the steps that led to the lake, telling to the night her sad lament, not in speech, indeed, but in piteous tears and broken moans. Alas! it was ever the same story; she could not bear it; it was something beyond endurance,—a suffering too keen, a torment too pitiless. "Oh, to die," she thought, "to die, and be at rest." Her despair had reached its height; the gloom of that starless night, the cool depths of those waters which she heard but did not see, tempted her. "Ah, if it could be done without my doing it," she thought, "it would be well. If that deadly water could come to me, and I not go to it, it would be well; for then it would be done, and without sin." "Ah, would

it be well, indeed?" asked stern Conscience; "are you so very fit to appear before your Maker—your God—a jealous God, as He has told you, you whose heart is the temple of a human idol? Ah, foolish girl, call not for death, say not 'let me be loved, or let me die;' say rather to Sorrow—'Welcome, thrice welcome, thou messenger of the Almighty's mercy, thou blessed chastiser of the human heart, thou severe but sacred purifier of human affections.'"

"I cannot, I cannot!" cried Adèle, answering that ruthless voice, "God gave him to me, and bade me love him; and there are not two ways of loving. He is my husband; I am his wife—I belong to him; and not to love my master would be the degrading bondage of a slave indeed. Speak thus to the unwedded and the free, but never tell a woman not to love the man to whose days her days are bound for ever; never forbid the wife to love her husband. What, live with him, and not love him! Ah, you are mad!" she said, answering that unknown, unseen antagonist; "you have no husband; you do not know what you say." And with that indignant answer came the thought of what marriage is or can be—of all that her wedded life was not; and again she wrung her hands with passionate despair; again she wept. Suddenly she started to her feet.

"Jeannette," she cried, angrily; "did I not tell you, once for all, not to come here?"

"Well, but I am not Jeannette," said the voice of Mr. Osborne, and foreseeing that she would attempt to escape, his hand held her arm securely.

Adèle felt as if she would have liked to jump into the lake, for sobs and tears which she could not repress broke with passionate lament from her heaving bosom and disturbed the stillness of the night.

"Ah! let me go," she cried at length; "let me go! You know very well that you do not like me. Why then come to me here as if you did? I tell you I cannot bear this kindness, which always looks like love, and is not; which springs from a delicacy that would not wound, from a duty that would not grieve and never from love. Hate me if you like, but do not pretend to like me."

She leaned her head on the stone balustrade and sobbed bitterly.

"Child," he said, gently, "what ails you?"

"Child! I am not a child! I was a child when you married me—but, ah! I am not a child now. I am, God help me, a miserable woman, wretched amongst the wretched; I am a wife whom her husband does not love."

He did not speak. He had no wish to check her reproaches.

"You cannot say you do," she persisted; "you know you cannot."

She paused; no justification passed his lips. Her soul rose; it was as if a storm had seized her whole being.

"You ask what ails me!" she said. "Ah! you know very well what ails me. Did you not triumph over my folly the other day in the study? did you not taunt me with it in the maze, and dare me to deny it? did you not, an hour ago, secure of your power,

make me confess myself but too happy and too glad to be received once more into grace? And now you ask what ails me! I will tell it to you. Whether you like it or not, I will tell it to you. What ails me is, that I love you very much, and that you love me very little. What ails me is, that this life and the next do not seem too long for that love to me; and that night and morning — ay, with all your kindness—you lament the day when Adèle became your wife. Ah! why did you marry me? I was fond of my friend, and my friend was fond of me—and now my friend is gone—and where is my husband? I did not ask you for love then—I could have lived years in this house with you, and never have dreamed of that; but now—but now to be your wife, and not to be loved, is more than I can bear—it kills me—it makes me die."

Desolate and heart-broken indeed rose her childish voice—voice too young to tell in such passionate language, such passionate sorrows. The sky had cleared; from behind white mists the yellow moon looked down with a veiled light upon them both. Mr. Osborne stood leaning on the stone balustrade, and he was silent and pale as death. The reproaches of his wife overwhelmed him—not because they were just, for they were unreasonable, unjust, wild,—but because they told him what depths of woe had been sounded in that young heart; to what torment love for him had brought the once careless girl. Speak he could not, but spite her resistance, he took her in his arms, and spite all she could do, he kissed her face, on which her own tears would not let him feel his.

"Perhaps you cannot help it," she said in a subdued voice; "I know you did not marry me for love. But still—but still—you might have liked me. I am not worth much—true—but you took me not from the hand of man—you took me from the hand of God, and for the sake of the Giver the gift might have been dear. Ah! remember — remember our marriage morning. Remember the blessing that was called down upon us—remember what we promised. Remember that you were told to love me as Christ loved His Church; remember, that I was commanded to love you as that Church must ever love that heavenly Bridegroom. You were not told to be kind to me, you were told to love me—to be fond of me. And do you think," she added, breaking off from pathos into petulance, and vainly trying to free herself from his arms with a childish abruptness, for which he liked her none the less, though he resisted it; "do you think I am going to be cheated in that fashion, and to take a kiss and a kind word for the love a man can give to his wife? No, sir," she added, with some passion; "no—I will be all to you, all that a woman can be to her husband—or I will be nothing."

But as she uttered the last fatal word, her heart failed her, her head sank on her bosom, her arms fell powerless by her side; weak, speechless, submissive, like a wilful child whose passion is all exhausted, she let him bear her away, place her on a bench, and sit there by her.

Mr. Osborne felt strangely perplexed. Delicate and proud, spite all her daring and her frankness,

Adèle had disdained to utter the name of her friend, to sully it with a breath or insult him with a doubt. Her silence touched and embarrassed him. To answer passion with passion, reproaches with lover-like protestations, were things impossible to his reserve and his pride; and to say the truth, he felt just then inclined to nothing so much as to chide this provoking girl, who, first by her indifference, and then by her love, had, for the last six months, been his torment.

"I declare," he cried, with some anger, "there never was so perverse a little creature. Adèle, Adèle, you are as tender and as sweet as a rose on a briar: but woe be to him who touches you—he will be pitilessly pricked; woe be to him who would like to gather so dangerous a blossom—it will make him bleed daily; it will be the delight of every sense, the charm of his eyes, and the torment of his heart."

Adèle bent forward and looked in his face; he smiled with some bitterness.

"You will see nothing new there," he said, rather sharply.

"Once for all, if you like me, tell me so," she cried.

"Do you think me capable of a lie?" he asked.

The question roused her strangely.

"God forbid!" she cried; "God forbid!"

"Well, then, once for all, once for ever, I like you."

He pressed her to his heart with a fervour, he spoke with a vehement simplicity that would have

convinced one less willing to be convinced. She believed him with her whole soul, with her whole heart she believed him, and mute joy invaded and possessed her whole being.

"Ah, God is good!" she cried at length, with a burst of triumphant gladness that showed Mr. Osborne, far better than her kneeling prayers night and morning, how deep and true was set the Divine presence in the heart of his young wife; "and how wicked I have been, but I shall be good now."

"Humph! we shall see that," he could not help saying, with a touch of that irony which ever came uppermost.

"Precisely," she said, shortly, "just as I shall find out whether you really do like me or not. Oh! but I am so happy," she cried, with a suddenness that pleased him well, it was so joyous; "so very happy! If I could only make you feel and understand it—but I never could. Ah! one can tell grief, yes, but joy, but happiness, never, never."

She hid her face in her hands and laid her head on his shoulder; and whilst he clasped her there, the silence of happiness fell around them. He, too, spoke no more. There is a charm in the stillness that is conscious of sight, sound, and all surrounding things, and this charm they both felt in its fulness.

Her soul felt wrapped in a religious shadow. She had been foolish, proud, rebellious, despairing—and gentle, benignant Providence had rewarded her sins with unmerited blessings. "I have not deserved it," she thought; "oh no, I have not," and then came a consoling, though humbling thought; "what do

we ever deserve? What is there that is not the gift of a bounty both royal and divine?"

He too thought, "How unwisely if I could I would have shaped my course: in solitary, purposeless wanderings, in single and selfish joys!"

Solitude, liberty, wandering, faded into the past; without sorrow he saw them go; with a smile he bade them farewell. For they left behind them in the silence and half gloom of that soft May night, a young wife whom he loved, a beating heart which he could grieve or bless: Empire so sweet to the tenderness, so dear to the pride of man, that he rarely holds it too dearly bought.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAPPY HOURS.

"Is there in this wide world a happier creature than I am to-day?" thought Adèle, as holding Lilian's hand she ran down with her the sunny, broad alley. "Ah, no, there is not, there is not." The words rang in her heart like the burden of a joyful song. The morning was fresh and bright; the child laughed as she ran with childish glee, and her young stepmother, almost as much a child, laughed from the fulness of a happy heart. Mr. Osborne was returning from the counting-house when he met them both. He was not a domestic man, but as they paused before him, as he rested his right hand on the shoulder of his blooming young wife, as he laid his hand on the head of his little girl, he thought that a woman and a child were beautiful things in a human home. Lilian soon ran away; whilst she played on the path before them, they slowly walked to the house.

"Ah, what a lovely morning," cried Adèle.

"And what a lovely thing a happy face is," he thought, looking down at her with a fond smile.

Her raised look sought his bent gaze. Serene happiness shone on his handsome face; serene joy beamed in her aspect, fresh and fair as beauty at seventeen. For a moment they looked at one another with mingled fondness and pride, each pleased to love what each admired. He smiled at her look, which he knew how to read; she slightly reddened at his gaze, which she understood.

"Where have you been so early?" she asked.

"To the counting-house."

"And what have you been doing there?"

"Locking it up."

"I am glad—right glad; but what will you do now that you have nothing to do?"

"I shall finish the rebuilding of Courcelles."

"You cannot be rebuilding for ever."

"Perhaps I shall turn pastoral, and feed sheep. Perhaps I shall turn agricultural, and grow corn; and perhaps I shall do nothing, or, what comes to the same, make love."

Adèle laughed gaily; a light sound disturbed that merry mood. She turned round. Isabella stood by them in the path; with a stern smile she passed on.

"She is going in to breakfast," said Adèle; "shall we not go in too?"

"You are in a great hurry," he replied; "sit down here a while here with me."

They sat down in an arbour, and Mr. Osborne spoke to his wife not of love nor of any thing like it, but of Courcelles and the changes he contemplated

making in it; of a journey they were to take together that autumn, of a governess for Lilian, of a fortunate turn his private affairs had taken, and a rise in certain shares which doubled his income. In short, for the first time he was confidential and communicative; and as his arm was resting on the back of the wooden bench behind her, and he was all the time smoking an excellent cigar, and felt both comfortable and happy, and comfort is a wonderful addition to happiness, it is no wonder that he forgot breakfast time.

Mrs. Osborne sat in the Hall admonishing Isabella, whom her morning walk had not enlivened. Sad and rigid had been the young girl's face since the De Launays had left. Mrs. Osborne was not a tender or an affectionate mother, but she was not either without the feelings of nature. She felt concerned for Isabella.

"My dear," she said, half kindly, half remonstratively, "you are wrong—very wrong; you are eighteen, you are handsome, well educated, well born—think of all that."

"And what good will it do me?" asked Isabella, moodily.

"My love, try and imagine first that such a person as Monsieur de Launay never existed. I have too much faith in your good sense to suppose that your affections were deeply engaged."

"I liked him," said Isabella.

"My love!" cried Mrs. Osborne.

"Yes, laugh at me, despise me—I know I deserve it all," exclaimed her daughter, with much emotion,

"but I liked him. I laughed at him, I meant to make a tool of him,—to marry him, indeed, but to use him, and instead of that he made use of me. He gave me up coolly and calmly, like a bad bargain, and I—night and day I torment myself because it is all over—because, worthless as he is, I cannot have him."

She laid her head on the table and cried passionately.

"My dear," said Mrs. Osborne gravely, "this alters the case quite. If you like him, have him, by all means."

Isabella looked up amazed. Mrs. Osborne smiled.

"My dear, you cannot be so ignorant of your own power as to think that unless Monsieur de Launay marries some one else off-hand, he can resist you."

"Ah, bah!" disdainfully said Isabella, "he did not like me."

"I perceive from this that you do like him, or you would not be so blind. He admired and liked you as much as a man who likes and admires himself can admire and like a woman."

"He admired Adèle much more than he admired me," said Isabella, with lurking jealousy.

"Indeed he did not; he could not. Mind, I do not say that before he saw you, he did not admire Adèle, knowing, too, that she had a fortune; but after you and he met, certainly not—certainly not."

She spoke confidently, and spoke as she felt. Isabella had inherited her mother's charms; and Mrs. Osborne could not think lightly of the commanding figure and blooming beauty she had transmitted to

her daughter. Isabella reddened a little, but why not say it? she felt rather comforted.

"The only difficulty," pursued Mrs. Osborne, "is to see him. He is in Paris, I believe; to go there alone would not accomplish our object. William must take us; he must have an establishment; I know that he has been a considerable gainer in railway speculations of late. We must make him part with Courcelles, which is a useless sort of lumber, and take a pretty little hotel in Paris. Madame de Launay never accompanies her nephew. We can meet him by chance at first, your beauty will do the rest. Let him only feel that you regret him."

"I cannot," interrupted Isabella.

"Well, my dear, please yourself; but I can assure you no man can resist *that*."

Mrs. Osborne was a case in point; she had won her first husband by no other magic. She was handsome, and he admired her until he learned she had no fortune. He then cooled down; but a fit of illness, brought on by regret for his loss, soon placed him, a hard man of the world however, helpless at her feet. Mrs. Osborne could not doubt that the same magic would work equally well with the Baron; but it was not necessary that Isabella should be her own betrayer. Her mother could do it for her infinitely better than Isabella could do it herself. Mrs. Osborne already with the mind's eye saw the devoted Baron's start and rapid blush: already she heard his murmured—"Ah, Madam!" with something about the angelic goodness of Isabella, and a more or less passionate protestation that he would

live and die for the fair lady who honoured him thus far. Nor were her visions all maternal. It tickled her fancy to triumph slyly over that too artful lady Madame de Launay, and make her nephew marry without a *sou* the same woman whom he could have had with a fortune, moderate, indeed, but better than none. It flattered her restless though well-hidden ambition, to feel power within her grasp, and rule that rebellious William who had baffled her so long, and who was now so softly entering her nets. But Isabella's temper had ruined many a plan well laid, well matured before this day. Somewhat anxiously she turned to her daughter, and said—

"Isabella, I will carry this matter through, but on one condition—you must not interfere. Whatever you hear, whatever you see—hear and see, but do not meddle. On that condition, and on that only, will I promise that you shall be Monsieur de Launay's wife."

Isabella had never been a very humble daughter; but love can humble the proudest hearts. There was a struggle between passion and pride: love prevailed: the promise was given. "I leave all to you," she said.

"You will not repent it; my love for you and my experience—how very late William and his wife are; the coffee will be cold.—Here they are."

The door opened, and Madame Lascours entered, but neither William nor his wife appeared. Mrs. Osborne gave Alice a cool, patronizing nod, and blandly inquired if she had seen the two truants. Madame Lascours looked surprised. Had not Mrs.

Osborne received the message entrusted to Jeannette for her ?

"I have received no message," said Mrs. Osborne, gravely.

"Then Monsieur Osborne will be very sorry to have kept you waiting. He is breakfasting with Adèle in the garden."

Mrs. Osborne poured out the coffee without a word, and without a word, when the meal was over, she rose and walked into the garden. They had not done breakfast yet; they were still sitting in the arbour, with a low round table near them, and Lilian standing by it, and making excursions into a plate of biscuits. Adèle had finished her meal, and was amusing herself with teazing her husband, who was more slow. He stretched out his hand for sugar, and the basin vanished behind her back. His spoon, his knife, his bread and his butter deserted him, and he only smiled at the mischievous elf.

"I cannot vex you," she said, at length.

"No, indeed, you cannot. I have no weak point."

Adele shook her head sceptically.

"You look at your whiskers," she said, "and if you should find one off to-morrow morning, what would you do ?"

"I should take off the other by all means."

"You would not be vexed ?"

"Why should I ?"

"You know well enough you are safe," demurely replied Adèle, softly patting his cheek ; "how could I have the heart to deprive you of so remarkable an ornament."

Mr. Osborne put down his cup, and looked at his wife with solemn gravity.

"Something very remarkable ails you this morning," he said; "I confess I cannot imagine what it is. Do you know, Lilian?"

Lilian's mouth was too full for her to answer the appeal. Mrs. Osborne, whom they had not perceived, gave the reply,—

"Our dear Adèle is in good spirits," she said, graciously.

She gave Adèle an inquisitorial look which made William's wife redden. She had a nervous consciousness that Mrs. Osborne's blue eyes were reading her through. The most innocent affection, the purest happiness have their mysteries. She started to her feet, and petulantly exclaiming,—

"Oh, you are too long, I cannot wait for you," she ran away, and left her stepmother and her husband together.

At the corner of an alley she met Alice; she stopped rather out of breath, and looked with surprise at her friend. Madame Lascours was in walking attire.

"You are going out?" said Adèle.

"I am going away."

"Why so?"

"My cousin wants me, and you do not."

"Yes I do."

"No, child, you do not."

"Well, then, Monsieur Osborne wants you for that business, you know. Stay, Alice, stay."

Her entreaties were all the more pressing that

conscience pricked her for having wronged them both. Alice looked down at her, and laid one hand on her shoulder, and clasped her other hand tenderly, and smiled at her flushed face.

"How pretty you look this morning," she said; "no wonder his eyes cannot get tired of your happy face; he might look far and wide and not see another like it."

Adèle gave her a surprised glance; then renewed her entreaties.

"Stay," she said, again and again.

But "I cannot," was the invariable reply of Alice.

"I cannot. This is not, and must not be my home; Monsieur Osborne will have the kindness to see to my affairs without my presence, and Madame Gérard feels lonely and wants me. I must go, but before I go, Adèle, I must tell you something. Monsieur Osborne is too proud to speak of me to you, and others might do it and not tell the truth. Indeed, how could they; he and I alone know what passed in this house between us nine years ago."

"No—no, do not tell me," stammered Adèle; "perhaps he does not wish me to know."

"He can have no such wish—unless for my sake, and if I choose to inflict on myself the mortification how can he object?"

Adèle was silent. Alice proceeded,—

"Nine years ago I was seventeen, and Monsieur Osborne was twenty-one, and unmarried. We met in this house: he had come to see his father; mine had not long been dead; my mother was with me.

She told me one day that she and Monsieur Osborne, the elder, had agreed that I and his son should marry. I did not object—how could I?—he was all that a girl of my age could desire. He seemed to like me too; we were thrown very much together, and he rather sought than shunned me. He never spoke of love, indeed, but what was I to think? One day he was missing—two days, and three, and an entire week passed, and he did not return; there was a gloom in the house; my mother was anxious; his father was dark. At length the truth came out—they had pledged him without his knowledge, and when ordered by his father to marry me, he indignantly refused. He did not like me, and he would not have me. He left the house and parted from his father in anger—they never met again—I was the cause of the estrangement. God forgive me if I judge wrongly, when I think that this marriage had been put into his father's head by his father's wife, for the very purpose of causing that estrangement. Well, you know all, now! Monsieur Osborne wrote me an honest and manly letter in his own justification. I answered, to tell him that I held him free from all blame. He married his cousin, I married Monsieur Lascours, and the world said that we had loved and been thwarted by our parents—it blamed me for infidelity, and pitied him for having had so inconstant a mistress. That is all, Adèle."

She had spoken very simply; and she looked calm and unmoved as she ceased; no flush of emotion had lit her cheek; no sad or fitful light had kindled her eyes.

She had said it truly: the cold water in the cold well was not colder than her heart. Adèle could not speak. She felt ashamed of having been jealous; ashamed of being happy and beloved; moved to the very heart, yet without a word to say, save a vehement—

"Good-bye, Alice, and God bless you."

"Good-bye, Adèle."

She stooped, kissed her, and went. And Adèle, still surprised and perturbed, let her go, and remained in the alley, standing there mute and wondering at the fact she yet could not understand: how Mr. Osborne had never loved Alice, and could love her.

Madame Lascours found her host in the Hall, with his stepmother and his sister. With surprise and concern he heard that she was going; he pressed her to stay, and was gently, but so firmly refused, that he desisted from his entreaties. Then he said that he would accompany her home, for Madame Gérard did not live more than a mile and a-half away. Alice looked distressed, and entreated him not to do so.

"But, I am sure Adèle would like to join us," he urged.

"Let me go away alone," she entreated.

At once he was silent; but to his surprise and to that of Alice too, Isabella now spoke.

"You are in a great hurry to leave us," she said.

Her tone was almost cordial, her aspect was almost gay. Ten years of care and bitterness had faded from her face. Madame Lascours looked at

her with astonishment, and from her she looked to Mrs. Osborne.

The look won no response; Mrs. Osborne was sitting straight on a chair, with a cold, grey face, on which sullen and stern disappointment was written.

"Yes, is it not a shame, Isabella?" said a light, gay voice, and a blooming face appeared under the arm of Alice, which a small hand raised gently. Adèle had recovered her wits, and had come to bid her friend another adieu. But though Alice smiled, her purpose was not altered. She kissed Adèle, she gave her hand to Mr. Osborne and Isabella; she bowed to Mrs. Osborne, and she was gone.

"Oh! what shall I do without her?" cried Adèle, making a great effort not to cry.

Isabella gave her a look, which, for once, was more kindly than ironical. If Monsieur de Launay had really slighted Adèle for her sake, she could really feel benevolently towards Adèle.

"Your wife has a warm heart," she said to her brother William.

"But I cannot let you cry," said Mr. Osborne, sitting down by his wife, who was now fairly in tears; he smiled at her grief, even though he wiped her wet cheek with his handkerchief.

Adèle laughed, and looking up at Isabella, she said:

"He is so kind!"

"Oh! what a pair of turtles!" cried Miss Osborne with good-humoured irony. "You cry because your friend is going, and you are an angel; he lends

you his handkerchief, and *he* is an angel. I wonder you do not get tired of it."

"Oh! we have a little variety now and then," said Mr. Osborne, rather drily; "have we not, Adèle?"

Their looks met consciously. Miss Osborne sat down, and said, "Oh, dear!" and forgot them, to think of Auguste. She was eighteen, sanguine and not so very deeply in love as to cherish the despondent mood for its own sake.

Mrs. Osborne sat in her chair rigid, motionless, and she looked at Mr. Osborne sitting by his wife, in a window, and talking to her in low tones, with a dark and sullen eye. Their reconciliation, their fondness had dethroned her. Her rule was over; her schemes were dashed to the earth like broken Dagons and senseless Baals.

Once more she was nothing and no one, or rather she was the mother of Robert, the dishonoured fugitive; she was the mother of Isabella, the slighted or rejected girl; she was the owner of one hundred and seventy pounds a-year. At the very moment when she thought herself most sure of him, William Osborne had slipped through her strong grasp. And with a galling unconsciousness of his offence, he had that morning asked her to rejoice over the restored health of his wife; with provoking insolence he allowed her and every one who liked to see that he was the first humble servant of the little and beloved mistress of Courcelles.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE DAY.

THE sun is up; bright, joyous, ardent, he hangs self-poised above a mountain peak, and ascends the pale sky of early morning. And with the sun, as eager to fill her race, as joyous in her happy youth, Adèle has arisen.

She has a great deal to do to-day, as, indeed, she has every day. Every hour that sun will measure before he sets red and burning behind the dark fringe of the western mountain, is full for Adèle, full of tasks self-appointed, all pleasing, and some delightful.

Young wives have various ways of showing that they are happy women. Some coo like doves, some frolic like kittens; but he must be rather a dreamy man that can bear cooing the whole day long; and it must be a wonderfully amiable kitten that never gives a scratch. Young wives who would not be thought a bore or a nuisance—and we appeal to the most enthusiastic lovers of the feline race, are not kittens a nuisance now and then?—do not

hang on the beloved; do not be too playful either: do as Adèle did, take to house-keeping, and make him as comfortable as you can. You need not, like her, rise with the sun.

She likes that early hour. Joyful and light she glides down the silent staircase, where the sunbeams dance gaily on the dark, polished steps, or creep along the pannelled walls. Everywhere closed doors meet her; everywhere she finds the stillness of morning and the repose of sleep. She enters a long passage, it leads her to the door of her husband's new sitting-room in the new part of the house. She enters it, a privilege which Jeannette alone shares with her mistress. It is a large room, vast and high, but cheerful, spite its sombre furniture; deep are its chairs, broad its tables, where papers and books lie scattered, for Mr. Osborne is a careless man; a solemn look have the bronze busts on their stands; pale gleams of light shine back from the carved oak cabinet; and yet it is a cheerful room, for Jeannette has left the windows open, that sunshine and air may enter; the morning breeze plays with the long, sweeping curtains, and each window frames a different picture; one of a lake where shadows are sleeping; one of mountains where every slope is sunlit; and one, the central window, of a verdant garden, with a glancing fountain; its waters play in the sun and fall in white foam and with a pleasant sound in a stone basin, around which bloom flowers of vivid hue, scarlet geraniums, yellow calceolaria, and delicate heliotrope. It is opposite this window that Mr. Osborne sits; and here, with diligent hand,

Adèle repairs the disorder left behind by that untidy man. It is her first daily task; he never thanks her for it; perhaps he knows not that she does more than place the vase of flowers on his table, and to say the truth, Adèle does not care for thanks; she does that because she likes it, for no other reason. Yet for many reasons is that room dear to Adèle.

The housekeeping fit seized her one bright morning when her husband left Courcelles on one of his last business errands, and with the intimation that he might not return for three or four days. Adèle suddenly discovered that the house is a wonderful world to rule, and that though she had done her duty, she had not yet done her best. With joyful enthusiasm and young ambition she seized her sceptre and entered on the government of her new empire. She began with a general survey of the house. Mr. Osborne had repaired the walls and the roof, but, true man as he was, he had stopped there, and left many a room cold and bare, other cares, other thoughts than the thought and the care of furnishing them had absorbed him, until he forgot them entirely. Adèle went through them with a pensive look, then suddenly turning to Jeannette, who stood behind her holding a bunch of keys, she said—

"Jeannette, there is a great deal of old furniture upstairs, is there not?"

"Yes, Madame, a great deal: the very furniture, too, that was in these rooms until Monsieur Osborne's father sent it to the garret, and said it was only fit for that."

The eyes of Adèle sparkled.

"Jeannette," she cried, "we will bring it back; you will tell Jean to put it as it was formerly; yes, every chair shall be where it was sat on, every bed shall stand where it was slept in, a hundred years ago."

"Ah, Madame," said Jeannette, "it is very old."

"Never mind its age; it will give a decent and venerable look to these bare rooms, which I hate."

"Is Madame sure that Monsieur will not object?" dubiously suggested the old woman.

"Object!" echoed Adèle, seeming amused, "oh, no! he has told me once for all that I was Queen absolute within the house, so he must keep his word. Let us go at once."

And at once they went along endless passages, up endless staircases, until the lumber-rooms were reached. Adèle passed through them silently; when she reached the last and largest, she paused, and leaning her cheek on her hand, she looked around her pensively. The sense of something sad and solemn came to her with the aspect of that decayed furniture mouldering away neglected in that deserted room. Through dust-stained windows the sunshine streamed in, and fell in golden streaks on the dark and ancient floor. Before her rose a vast bed seven feet square, with massive pillars which branches of feathers crowned like a hearse; wiry-legged chairs with the gilding all worn off the red wood, with the canvas of the worsted-work bare in patches, stood empty and melancholy in a group hard by. A bureau of marqueterie, where the once vivid red of the roses had faded into a tawny pink, still bore the traces of

ancient ink; the damask hung loose on the sofa; the red velvet cushion yet showed where dainty feet had rested on it of yore; it was as if generations had faded back into the past. And two rather shabby portraits who stood in a corner—one of a blooming beauty with powdered hair and pink roses, the other of a fastidious-looking gentleman in blue velvet, with his white hand on the hilt of his sword, and who seemed to gaze at the world through weak, half-shut eyes, looked reproachfully at their descendant. "Do you imagine," they said, "that we too did not love when we were in our prime? That bed has received beauty in her bloom, and nursed her to happy slumbers and happy dreams; on that mouldering bureau was written the prettily-worded and ill-spelt note which the happy lover kissed with transport, and wore near his heart at the battle of Fontenoy, that gallant battle, the last relic of chivalry, when foe bowed to foe with old courtesy, and yielded to his enemy the pleasure of firing first. Look at these chairs, they have received the rustling hoops and ample-tailed coats of a gay assembly; that very cushion, on which a silky spaniel slept at the feet of his mistress, whilst her delicate fingers were busy in parfilage, and her ear listened to soft speech, ought to speak to you of the fleeting charm of beauty, of the perishable nature of love. Ah, foolish child! renounce a transitory world, put a veil on your head, and enter a convent at once."

"But I cannot enter a convent!" promptly replied Adèle, amused at the internal dialogue. "I am married; and to punish you for giving me such an

impertinent piece of advice, you shall all pack down at once, bed, sofa, cushion, portrait—all of you."

So said, so done; for *désir de femme,* says the old French proverb, *est un feu qui dévore,* and Adèle felt that she could have no peace of mind or being until her wish was gratified. The furniture, when cleaned, mended, and repaired, proved to be better than Jeannette had thought, or than the late William Osborne had said; but he was a matter-of-fact man, who liked shining mahogany, clean carpets, bright fenders, and who hated antiquarian lumber; his son had other tastes, and though he was very sparing of praise when he returned, and whilst his wife's undertaking was in progress, he gave her the clearest proof of his approbation, when it was completed, by selecting one of the rooms she had thus restored to life for his own use.

Dear, therefore, is that room to Adèle, her first triumph ratified by her husband's choice and presence. There may be pride as well as love in the care she takes of it; and now having made it neat and nice, having placed every book where the hand she knows likes to find it, Adèle goes into the garden, and walks along the gravelled paths. She gathers the tallest roses where they hang all heavy with dew, and cover her face with sparkling drops; she runs into the grassy orchard, and fills the basket on her arm with the ripest fruit, before the heat of the sun shall have made it lose the delightful freshness of the night. The flowers are for his eye, the fruit is for his palate: it shall lie on green vine-

leaves, on a cool porcelain plate, at his hand; for, true woman, Adèle, likes to feed what she loves.

And now the sun is gaining strength; the Manor is astir; windows open, closing doors are heard; Adèle has barely time to hold a brief consultation with Jeannette, her major-domo, then runs up to her dressing-room, where Madame Leroy, who has returned from Mérigny, majestically waits; by the time her toilet is over, breakfast too is waiting below, and Mrs. Osborne not quite so sweet as of yore, Isabella pale and silent, and Mr. Osborne and Adèle alone smiling and happy, are gathered together: Anna is still trying the benefit of the waters of Mérigny, and Capitaine Joseph, who is on a visit to his "brother," breakfasts in his room.

The meal is over. Mr. Osborne goes to his sitting-room and Adèle stands still and thinks of what she is to do? Shall she give a look at that jelly which Jeannette is preparing below—shall she, like the lady in the "Spectator," work a leaf in her handkerchief? Better the handkerchief than the jelly, for one can do without her and the other cannot, and the garden is delightful to work in. She takes out her work-basket, forgets her thimble, then her thread, then her scissors, and finally has to go back for the handkerchief itself. As she crosses the court it suddenly occurs to her that she has not made Lilian read for these two days. The handkerchief must yield to Lilian, who is forthwith fetched, brought down, lured into the garden with a bright picture-book, and who, sitting in a shady arbour with her young stepmother, reads attentively for full five

minutes. But at the end of that time, a bird singing in the tree makes Lilian look up. Adèle takes her to where there is no bird, and Lilian sees a boat on the lake and cannot read, and Adèle, who does not wish to scold, and who does not like to yield, feels bewildered and perplexed, until Mr. Osborne releases them both. It is his voice calling; he is standing at his window. He wants Adèle on business. The lesson is over, joyously Lilian runs off to play with her bonne, and Adèle enters with a smile her husband's room. Every day she is called there, and it is long every day before the important business for which Mr. Osborne requires her presence is transacted. Letters to hunt for and refer to, accounts to make up, with occasional digressions, will take up time.

After business comes pleasure. Mr. Osborne thinks he would like a promenade on the lake: Adèle runs up to fetch her round hat, and comes back with Lilian. The lake is delightful, so cool, so silent; the boat glides along the still waters, and skirts a rugged shore. The arms of Adèle are clasped around Lilian, whose head has sunk on her step-mother's lap. Mr. Osborne looks at them both and smiles: the beautiful daughter, the more beautiful mother, the misquoted Horace of Capitaine Joseph, recur to him.

Glide on, happy boat, glide on for ever on a summer lake and never reach the shore of age or sorrow: thou bearest a freight more precious than the fortunes of Cæsar; thou bearest three happy hearts. Vain wish! Love but makes time seem more fleet;

day is declining; red streaks of light dart across the lake, and sink in the gloom of its waters. The boat is slowly returning; the sun has set as it reaches the stone steps that lead to the garden, now grey and silent. Lights are shining in the dining-room; once more the family is gathered—Capitaine Joseph appears and kindly takes on himself the whole burden of the conversation—to break up again when the meal is over; but this time Adèle and her husband retire together to his sitting-room, where the lamp burns waiting for them, and the moon looks in shyly above the little fountain. They talk, they laugh, Adèle sings, and finally, Mr. Osborne takes up a book and reads; Adèle, sitting on a stool at his feet, listens for a while, as attentively as any Mary; but Mary had not been busy like Martha, or she could not have listened. Adèle, who has been both Martha and Mary to-day, who rose with the sun and who is seventeen, feels very heavy. She leans her cheek on her hand, and allows her eyes to close; farther and farther sounds Mr. Osborne's voice. Adèle feels in a delightful state of reverie — she is not asleep, she is sure she is not; but suddenly Mr. Osborne's voice ceases; a great blank follows on dreamy thought; the head of Adèle has fallen heavily on her husband's knee; with a smile he lays down his book; Adèle is fast asleep.

We have given you, reader, the history of this one day, because, though so simple, it was a happy day, the last of its kind which Adèle was to know, the prelude to heavy and bitter trials, behind which the sun might shine indeed, but as in a cloud.

CHAPTER X.

MONSIEUR DE LAUNAY'S LETTER.

"I WISH I could cry," said Adèle, putting down her work.

Mr. Osborne, in whose room she was sitting, looked up with surprise from the letter he was writing.

"Cry! what for, child?" he asked.

"I do not know," she replied, disconsolately; "but I wish I could cry."

"And why can you not?" he inquired.

"Because I feel such a wish to laugh. It is very tiresome. I never felt so before. I laughed, I cried, but I never wished to do both."

"Do you feel dull—do you wish for anything?" he asked, at once.

"No. I only wish I could cry, and as I cannot, I must even bear my unhappy fate."

She spoke with a sorrow so whimsical that he could not help smiling. He was going to suggest a walk in the garden—it was still too hot to venture on the lake—when, throwing down her work, Adèle

discovered that it was that she disliked; then taking it up again, she perceived that she wanted some blue wool, in search of which she went at once. She left the room, and almost immediately afterwards she reappeared with a letter in her hand.

"What will you give me for it?" she asked, holding it up.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Osborne, dexterously snatching it from her.

"Very well," she petulantly replied; "wait till I bring you letters again."

And he saw with surprise that her eyes were dim. Mr. Osborne loved his young wife too much to teaze her, and his tenderness was too indulgent for him to be displeased, even with a sorrow so childish. He kindly drew her towards him, and asked what ailed her. It was some time before she would confess; at length it came out, not without tears:

"I dreamed last night that you were dead."

"Well, but I am living," he said, smiling.

"Ah! but you must die," said Adèle, passing her fingers through his dark curls, and looking down at him with fond regret: "You must die, and I cannot bear the thought."

"Of losing me," he interrupted. "Be comforted: an unerring presentiment, one of those presentiments that never deceive, assures me that I shall outlive you and marry a third wife, who will make me the happy father of nine lovely children."

"Take that from the second in waiting for the third and her nine children!" indignantly said Adèle, giving his hair a pull; and without waiting for the

punishment that would infallibly have followed the audacious act, she sprang to the door, and merely giving him a brief look of triumph, she vanished.

Mr. Osborne broke the seal of his letter; but he had barely time to glance at the signature, when the door opened again, and Mrs. Osborne, passing in her head, said softly:

"May we come in?"

"By all means," courteously replied Mr. Osborne, rising.

The door opened wide. Mrs. Osborne, Isabella, and Capitaine Joseph entered.

"This is a very trying day," said Mrs. Osborne, sinking down in a chair. "Isabella, my love, are you not in a draught?"

"I like a draught," replied Isabella, with an unamiable sternness which had of late become habitual to her, and which gave a sort of tragic solemnity to her least words and slightest actions.

"Draughts are bad things," promptly said Capitaine Joseph. "William, I shall close that window, with your permission."

Mr. Osborne assented; he foresaw a family explanation, and little as he relished it, he waited calmly. Capitaine Joseph shut the window, took a chair, put it between his legs as if it were a wooden horse, and meditatively leaning his chin on the sculptured back, he looked over at Mr. Osborne, and said impressively:

"William, those ladies feel dull."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Mr. Osborne.

"They think it is the country air."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and they think, too, that a journey to Paris, with me, when my leave of absence is out, would do them good."

Mr. Osborne had wished for and anticipated this too long to show any surprise or testify any regret.

"I can see no objection to this Paris journey," he said, quietly; "Courcelles is dull, I confess it. That trust, moreover, which brought us all here, is over; if I stay it is because I have contracted a new tie and entered on a new life. There is no reason why I should bind my stepmother and my sister to my home and my existence. It is true that I am none the richer for the inheritance I received from my father; but my income has been doubled of late by unexpected good fortune. It is in my power, as it is my will, that those who are so near to me should lead a free and unfettered life; I will, since we have broached this rather delicate subject, take immediate steps to secure to Mrs. Osborne and her daughters"—he was addressing Capitaine Joseph—"an independance and a home, wherever they please."

Capitaine Joseph thought this very handsome, and said so; Mrs. Osborne murmured something about goodness and gratitude. Isabella was silent and surly. Mr. Osborne resumed:

"I have just received a letter from Monsieur de Launay; I have not read it; I do not suppose it can affect a matter that must have been considered well."

He spoke leisurely, and he looked at Mrs. Osborne as he spoke, for he was not without some secret sus-

picion that she had been busy underhand, but Mrs. Osborne only coughed, and said:

"Indeed!"

And Isabella haughtily asked:

"How can Monsieur de Launay's letter affect us?"

"My dear child, there is no knowing," put in her mother; "I have always thought that Monsieur de Launay's instincts were generous."

"He keeps them under excellent control though," observed Capitaine Joseph ironically.

"Well," said Mr. Osborne, giving the three a quiet look; "it remains to be proved that this is not the most common-place of business letters: very likely some old account which I have forgotten, with my usual want of memory, to settle." And glancing at the letter, which he still held, Mr. Osborne read aloud: "'My dear angel.' This really cannot be meant for me," he said, looking up gravely; "Monsieur de Launay has committed a mistake in the direction."

He looked as he spoke at Isabella, who reddened.

"I did not know," pursued Mr. Osborne, rather seriously, "that you still corresponded with Monsieur de Launay. You are not wise, Isabella; but it is your own business."

He quietly handed the letter to her as to its legitimate possessor, but she pushed it away.

"I shall have nothing to do with it," she said, briefly.

"You are not wise," he repeated, with a displeasure free from anger.

Isabella looked very indignant.

"I beg," she said, haughtily, "that you will have the kindness to read that letter aloud and to the end. It will be more fair than to accuse and slander your sister in this fashion."

Mr. Osborne took up the letter and held it a moment in his hand, but he thought proper to comply with Isabella's request; and without comment he began again:

"'My dear angel, why did I vainly wait for you last night?'"

Mr. Osborne put down the letter and looked at Isabella with stern, angry eyes.

"What does this mean?" he asked in a low, subdued voice.

"Yes, what does it mean?" asked Capitaine Joseph, looking as fierce as any stage brother.

Isabella hid her face in her hands, and seemed unable to answer. Her mother looked with evident alarm at Mr. Osborne's face; it expressed deep and settled displeasure. After a pause, he read again:

"I walked about the garden three mortal hours, and heard midnight strike."

"Ah! it is too much!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, crushing the letter in his hand, and rising in great indignation; "it is too much, Isabella, you try my patience too far. What! after all you know of that man, you hold a clandestine correspondence with him, you give him stolen meetings in a garden at night. He has the right to address you in this tone, the power of boasting of your imprudence; I tell you that it is too much."

By this Isabella had partly recovered. Proudly she looked up.

"I defy him," she said; "he can say nothing of me. He must be mad to write to me in that style now. I have been foolish, but it was long ago."

"Foolish!" interrupted Capitaine Joseph, who had with great difficulty kept in so long. "Ma foi, I think that a young lady who gives private meetings is something more than foolish."

"Insult me, do!" cried Isabella, bursting into tears.

"And I sincerely pity her future husband," pitilessly continued Capitaine Joseph; "and I cannot help saying," he added, looking hard at his mamma, "that a little watching in the right quarter would have done no harm with so erratic a young lady. Locking her in at night, for instance, would not have been a useless precaution."

"You forget yourself, Joseph," gravely said Mrs. Osborne.

"Not in the least," phlegmatically replied her son; "I hate affairs of honour, and here is one out of which I cannot decently get. I shall most certainly have to call on Monsieur de Launay, and ask him to marry Isabella forthwith. No man," said Capitaine Joseph, giving his collar a pull and his moustache a twirl, "shall say that he had midnight meetings with a sister of mine, and get out of it so easily."

"Oh, pray let us have no tragedy," ironically observed Mr. Osborne.

Capitaine Joseph frowned.

"Monsieur Osborne," he said, "you cannot more than I do hold it an absurd law of society that ties

the honour of man to so frail a thing as woman's discretion; but whilst society does hold that law and doctrine, there is but one course open to men, and that course I shall certainly adopt."

"You will oblige me by doing nothing of the kind," angrily exclaimed Isabella, "I am perfectly competent to protect myself; and I tell you again that Monsieur de Launay must be mad to write to me now in that tone. The only letter which I received from him since our parting I sent back unopened."

"Humph!" sceptically said Capitaine Joseph, "that remains to be proved. I will, in the meanwhile, with your permission, read this precious epistle to the end. It may help to make the matter a little clearer."

He took Monsieur de Launay's letter from the table where Mr. Osborne had indignantly cast it, and he began smoothing it leisurely. Isabella waited haughtily; her mother looked more attentive than uneasy, and Mr. Osborne seemed sick and weary of it all. He stood, indeed, in a listening attitude, but neither curiosity nor expectation disturbed the calmness of his handsome countenance. At length Capitaine Joseph began reading partly aloud, partly to himself.

"Hem! 'my dear angel,' hem! 'too cruel—ay, very cruel—three mortal hours,'—hem! 'but you did not come—did not find the opportunity, I suppose. I tell you that your godmother suspects nothing, and that Morel is a fool who does not see beyond the end of his nose.' What does he mean

with his godmother and Morel?" asked Capitaine Joseph, looking up. He saw three pale faces, but not one word was spoken. He resumed: " 'I burn all your letters as you desire. Hard request to comply with, but you must be obeyed. I shall be to-night at the foot of the steps; if you cannot come put a letter under the old stone. Adieu. You make me half mad with your strange perversity. How can you be so kind and so pitiless in a breath? Ever yours, A. De Launay.'

" That is clear, though pitiless is out of place," said Capitaine Joseph, putting down the letter, and looking round. No one answered.

Isabella had risen. She stood, pale with wrath, in the centre of the room. Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, but words could not pass them. Mrs. Osborne had remained calm, but she looked at her stepson with strange intentness. He stood by the table, leaning upon it with one hand; the other hand was thrust in the bosom of his coat—he was rigidly pale, but collected.

" I knew they were two traitors," cried Isabella, pressing her forehead between her hands. " I knew it—I saw it—he and she. I tell you I saw it."

Mr. Osborne's look lit.

" You are raving," he cried, indignantly; " that letter is an impudent forgery."

" A forgery!" cried Isabella, snatching it up, " a forgery! I could swear he wrote it."

" Then it is an impudent slander!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, more indignantly than before; " a slander or a forgery, I repeat it. I care not which."

Isabella laughed bitterly.

"True, when the letter is for your sister she is upbraided as the most guilty of women—when your wife receives love letters, or gives midnight meetings, it is slander—it is forgery, of course."

Mr. Osborne's eyes burned with sombre fury.

"If it were not that you are mad with jealousy," he said, "I should resent your words as the deepest of insults. Even as it is, Isabella, never dare to speak so again. Never dare to hint that there is or that there can be a word of truth in this infamous accusation of an infamous foe."

He looked around him with a look defying denial. No one replied. Isabella trembled with passion and resentment, but she did not dare to brave her brother. Capitaine Joseph, who now understood the matter, looked, as he felt, confounded, and stared in silent amazement. Mrs. Osborne coughed gently, and attempted conciliation.

"This is very unfortunate," she began, looking dubiously at her stepson, "very unfortunate!"

"I think nothing of it," he angrily interrupted.

"Oh, of course not!"

"And though I shall sift this matter to the bottom," he resumed, "it is for the sake of her honour, not for my own conviction, which nothing can shake. That Adèle never received this letter I need not say; that she was never meant to receive it, I here again aver. She was not merely incapable of holding clandestine meetings with any man, but there was that in her which even in her carelessness would have protected her for ever from an attempt so in-

solent. But as I said I shall sift this matter to the bottom; not for my own sake. I know that when I married her she brought me the innocence of a child, the purity of a girl, the modesty of a woman; but for her sake she shall be justified. Her word would be sufficient for me, but I will have more than her word," he added, looking round him; "I will have proof so clear that calumny shall sink back into night. In the meanwhile, I request — I desire — that not a word of this may reach my wife. I will not sully or trouble her mind with such accusations."

He ceased, and sat down. This was more than Isabella could bear. She gave him a look of mingled anger and scorn, and muttered audibly the words, "Miserable infatuation!" But Mr. Osborne fortunately did not hear her. Mrs. Osborne had risen. She looked collected, grave, and dignified. Her aspect, her whole manner, implied, "This is an important crisis—I know it, and am prepared to act my part in it," and in a serious and measured tone that suited her manner, she said,—

"William, this is too delicate a matter for me to utter a word, or attempt even well-meant interference. All I can say is this; if you need me, you can command me."

There was in her manner, in her look, in her very voice, a sort of reserve that brought the blood up to Mr. Osborne's cheek. It implied that Mrs. Osborne was too discreet to say anything, but that she thought a good deal; that she knew better than to interfere, but that she was quite aware her interference would in time be both needed and requested.

Half angrily Mr. Osborne would have thanked her for her offer, but have asked at the same time how he was likely to make it available, if at this precise moment the door had not opened, and Adèle had not entered the room with her blue wool in her hand. She gave a look of slight surprise at the group before her: for no one ever entered Mr. Osborne's room; and there was something, too, in the faces which she saw, that involuntarily struck her. But she had not time to dwell on their meaning. Isabella gave her sister-in-law an annihilating look, and sweeping past her, left the room. Adèle coloured, and turned to Mrs. Osborne.

"It is a very close day," observed that lady, in a remote tone, that implied she was very far away, and without looking at Adèle, or addressing any other remark to any one present, she bent her head and walked out too. Adèle looked dubiously at Capitaine Joseph, who alone looked and spoke as usual.

"Blooming as ever," he gallantly said; "fresh as the rose in your hair."

Adèle shook her head, and the rose she had put there in the morning fell on the floor at her feet. At once Capitaine Joseph picked it up and presented it to her with an air. She took it with a smile, and the smile seemed to Capitaine Joseph so sweet and so happy that his heart, which was a soft heart in the main, was touched, "Poor little thing!" he thought, "she is merry now, but how will it end?"

Capitaine Joseph disliked painful thoughts and

feelings. He looked at his watch, and slapped his forehead.

"What! so late as that?" he cried; "I really must leave you," and giving his young sister-in-law a tender and pitying glance, he left her alone with her husband.

The door closed upon him. Adèle stood with her rose in her hand like one amazed and perplexed.

"What ailed Isabella!" she asked of Mr. Osborne.

"Do not mind Isabella, child."

"Oh, I do not mind her. I pity her. She has misery written in her face. You may be sure she was fond of him, but I do not think he can have been fond of her. Mrs. Osborne, too, looked strange, I thought, and even Capitaine Joseph did not seem quite as happy as usual. Has anything happened?"

He asked how she could put such a question.

"What ails them all?" she persisted, looking with a wondering smile up in her husband's face.

The dinner bell, ringing loud and clear, spared him the trouble of replying.

"So late!" cried Adèle; "would you have thought it was so late?"

Mr. Osborne did not answer—he had not heard her. With a clouded brow he was folding up Monsieur de Launay's letter, and putting it in his pocket. He did not see Adèle stealing softly behind him, he was not aware of her intent, until her light hand had snatched the letter from his. He turned round, red with involuntary displeasure. She laughed gaily, and holding the letter behind her back, she looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"I have got it back again," she said, merrily. "What will you give me for it now?"

Mr. Osborne bit his lip and tried to smile.

Poor Adèle little knew how sad was her jest, how ill-timed was her revenge to her husband. But he earnestly wished her to know nothing, and dreading lest she should catch a glimpse of that letter, or divine its contents, he tried, as we said, to smile, and asked what she wanted?

"Shall I get it?"

"Certainly!—that is to say, if you will at once restore my property," he added.

He spoke negligently, yet his wife noticed a sort of anxiety in his look. She placed the letter in his hand, and it seemed to her that he took it eagerly. Carefully he put it away in his pocket-book, and carefully he placed his pocket-book in his safest pocket.

"What is that letter about?" she asked, curiously.

"Tell me, rather, what ransom you exact for your captive, little pirate?" he replied.

"I want Lilian to dine with us to-day; she asked me, and I said—'Yes, if you would.'"

Mr. Osborne's brow cleared; he was pleased with the request; the presence of Lilian would spare some awkwardness at the dinner-table. He looked kindly at his young wife.

"I wondered if you were asking anything for yourself," he said, "that would be unlike you."

"You leave me nothing to ask for," she replied; "you make me, as you said you would, the happiest little lady in Courcelles."

She spoke simply, yet with the earnestness of

grateful affection. She loving another man before she had loved him; she holding midnight meetings with a lover! He derided the insolent thought. His outstretched arm drew her gently towards him; and, fondly he pressed her to his heart, and with avenging tenderness he kissed her. His looks were kind, and kinder still were his caresses; yet as Adèle looked in his eyes, she felt vaguely that something ailed him; as she gazed in his face she saw that it was not the same face she had gazed on that morning.

"What was there in that letter?" she asked, softly.

"Oh, nothing!" he carelessly replied; and withdrawing from her, he asked if it were not time to go to dinner. Again his brow had become clouded. Adèle stood where he had left her, looking at him very earnestly. She felt what she had not felt for a long time, that a secret divided her from her husband. She put no more questions, but she fell into a long, deep dream.

"And Lilian?" said Mr. Osborne, suddenly turning round.

"I shall go for her," abstractedly replied Adèle; but even as she closed the door, she thought—"what can there have been in that letter?"

Isabella was alone in the Hall when Mr. Osborne entered it. She stood leaning against the marble mantel-piece, pale and sullen; her whole aspect alarmed her brother. That Mrs. Osborne or Capitaine Joseph would speak to Adèle he did not apprehend; but Isabella was amenable to no control, and just

then she looked equal to anything. He went up to her.

"Isabella," he said, impressively, "you will not forget that Adèle is to know nothing."

He laid some stress on the last word, and his hand lightly pressed her arm as he spoke. She bent her haughty head, and smiled without looking at him.

"You shall be obeyed," she replied.

"I pity you," said Mr. Osborne.

"And I pity you!" she retorted; "for you were blind, and I was not. You saw nothing," she added, looking moodily at him; "I saw it from the day when standing in that window he turned pale to see the meeting between your wife and you, when, striking his forehead, he cried—'Good God, they are married!' Pray what was it to him that you or that any man had become the husband of Adèle? He was more on his guard afterwards, but I saw it still, and you never did. Do not pity me, I say; I have been wronged, but I have not been blind."

With a tormenting interest which he would not have acknowledged even to himself, Mr. Osborne heard her. He hated to think that Monsieur de Launay should have presumed to admire his wife so far as to be jealous of him, her husband, but he scorned to confess it. He smiled, and said, coolly—

"When a man marries a pretty woman, he must expect her to be admired. I do not quarrel with Monsieur de Launay for having admired Adèle. She is beautiful, and it would be strange if he had not seen it."

The eyes of Isabella sparkled with resentment, but the coldness of Mr. Osborne's manner always exercised a sort of control over her; and though his words now seemed to her no less than an insult and a taunt, the retort that rose to her lips died there unspoken, arrested by the calm severity of his dark eyes, and by the steadiness of his fixed look—a look that said plainly—"Think before you speak."

She did not answer, and he said no more. In a few minutes the door opened again, and Mrs. Osborne and Capitaine Joseph entered. Adèle appeared last. She came in leading Lilian by the hand. For once the youthful grace of her aspect gave her husband a sort of pain, for once he looked at her and beheld her beauty without pleasure. Could it be that Monsieur de Launay's admiration had gone so far as his jealous sister declared?

He bit his lip, and carelessly received Lilian's kiss. Adèle stood by his side; she looked at him wistfully, for she saw well enough that something ailed him; but this was no time and no place for questions. She told Lilian to let her papa alone, and gently took her away.

The dinner began; it was silent and formal. "What ails them all?" thought Adèle, looking round on the little circle. Isabella she did not venture to address; that young lady looked even more than usually gloomy; but she said to Mrs. Osborne, next whom she sat—

"Are you not well, Madame?"

"This stormy day has given me a headache," replied Mrs. Osborne.

Her tone was civil, but distant, as Mr. Osborne noticed and resented. He looked at her cold face, at Isabella's sullen countenance, and he angrily wondered when this unamiable family would leave him his home and peace. But as he, too, forgot to speak, the meal would have been entirely silent, if, towards its close, Capitaine Joseph had not fortunately begun a flirtation with Lilian, by which it was somewhat enlivened. Mrs. Osborne and her daughter remained portentously grave. Adèle smiled once or twice, but her husband saw the smile fade from her face as her look rested on the solemn countenances of her mother and sister-in-law. "It will not last long, it could not," he thought, as he rose from the table.

He gave a look at the sky, and at once Adèle guessed, with the quick intuition of affection, an intuition that springs from constant attention, that he was going out. She, too, rose, and went up to him.

"It is late to go out," she said wistfully.

"But not too late," he replied gently.

He saw his stepmother and his sister exchange a look significant though rapid; he kindly drew his young wife towards him, and looking down fondly in her upraised face, he silently vowed that their malice should be defeated yet. Mr. Osborne and Isabella were standing apart. Capitaine Joseph and Lilian were carrying on their flirtation, which degenerated into romping. Without saying that he was going out, Mr. Osborne left the room, and Adèle followed him silently. They now stood together on

the door steps; her arm was passed within his, her head rested against him.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To Nantua."

"What for?"

"On business."

She raised her languid head. She had felt sad the whole day; she felt sadder as it drew to a close. She looked at the sky; clouds, purple and vast, passed across it; the light of the setting sun down the mountains, on the lake, and across the path, looked lurid and fitful; the air was hot and oppressive. Her head sank back, and she sighed.

"Do not go," she said, "there will be a storm to-night. Stay for this once with me."

"There will be no storm, and I shall be home early," he replied with a smile.

"But why must you go?" she asked.

"Because I can have no peace and no rest unless I do go," he replied, with involuntary force.

She gave him a wondering look; he did not give her time to question.

"I shall be home early," he said again, and he was gone.

She stood looking at him until he vanished down the path; then she re-entered the house and apathetically returned to the dining-room. Mrs. Osborne and her daughter were conversing in whispers.

"It must be for that he is gone," said the mother.

"Of course it is," impatiently replied Isabella; "I care nought about it."

Here Mrs. Osborne, perceiving that Adèle stood

looking and listening to their broken speech, pulled her daughter's skirt, a hint to be silent which Isabella indignantly received with a—

"I really do not care who hears me."

Adèle turned away and went and sat in one of the windows that overlooked the road. He was but just gone, and she was already longing for his return. She felt full of sorrow, she herself could not have said why, and tears, of which she was not conscious, slowly flowed down her cheek. A gentle cough roused her from her reverie. She looked up and perceived that she was alone in the darkening room with Capitaine Joseph. Mrs. Osborne, Isabella, and even Lilian were gone. He stood by her chair, looking down at her with evident emotion.

"Do not fret," he said, kindly, "it will be nothing, rely upon it."

"What will be nothing?" asked Adèle, with such evident wonder, that her brother-in-law saw she knew nothing, and perceived he had committed a blunder.

"What you are fretting about, whatever that may be," he said, with an air of bonhommie that deceived Adèle.

"I am fretting about nothing," she said; "I feel sad, but I have no cause."

"The cause may come yet," thought Capitaine Joseph, rubbing his nose, but he only said, "Ah!" and spoke of Lilian.

"She is a charming little thing," he said; "but she pinched me—she actually did."

"And she is out in the garden now," cried Adèle,

starting up as she heard Lilian's voice outside; "oh, the naughty child! she will take cold. If you you do not help me to catch her, Capitaine Joseph, I shall never be able to get her in. She is so disobedient."

"I shall be pinched again," said Capitaine Joseph; "but I mind nothing in your service."

They went out together. Evening was falling on the old garden, and the dew already lay heavy on the grass-plot where Lilian sat playing. In her sweetest tones Adèle called in her little stepdaughter, but Lilian did not move.

"Your papa will be very angry," said Adèle gently.

"I don't care."

"And I shall not marry you," said Capitaine Joseph, solemnly.

"I would not have you," replied Lilian; "I do not like your ugly yellow moustache."

There is no denying that Capitaine Joseph was considerably piqued. His moustache was his weak point, his heel of Achilles; he had a vague feeling that it was not of the right colour, that it might have been of a more becoming hue. He had intended to use great diplomacy with Lilian, to lure her in with some stratagem worthy of the wise Ulysses himself, and without so much as stirring hand or foot, but on hearing her insolent speech his resolve vanished. He made a dart, in vain Lilian screamed, she was caught in a second, brought in to her mamma, and dropped without having so much as had the time to inflict one pinch on the valiant captain.

"There! what do you say to that?" he asked, triumphantly.

"There never was a better brother-in-law," replied Adèle, who liked him, perhaps, because he liked her.

Capitaine Joseph smiled and smoothed his injured moustache, and looked rather tenderly after Adèle, as she re-entered the house, holding by the hand her little stepdaughter, who, since her capture, had remained sulkily silent.

"It will go hard if I do not help that nice little thing to get out of that scrape," thought Capitaine Joseph, rubbing his chin. "The insolent little monkey is like her father;—yellow, indeed!" We need not say to whom the latter remark applied.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE STORIES.

The day had been warm; the evening was sultry and dark. Adèle sat alone in her room. Her window was open; it framed a starless sky, on which the black outline of hills was scarcely visible. Not a breath of air stirred the muslin curtains; no passing breeze flickered the steady flame of her little bronze lamp: an antique lamp it was, which had been found in Pompeii, and had lit in its day the anxious or idle vigil of some Greek or Roman beauty, and which now burned in an old French manor, and illumed the fair and blooming face of the daughter of those Frank barbarians who conquered both the Roman and the Gaul.

That lamp, one of Mr. Osborne's trophies from Italy, was also one of his earliest gifts to his wife. Spite the dainty and elegant workmanship of the Cupid riding the dolphin, it gave but poor light, yet Adèle would allow no other to be lit in her room. Her husband laughed at her for a preference of which he did not seem to guess the cause. We need

scarcely say, that he knew it well enough; we need not add that he liked it. He thought it childish, as it was, but are they the wisest things that please us best?

They had often sat together, with that ancient lamp lighting their two happy faces; but Adèle now sat alone, vainly and anxiously waiting for Mr. Osborne. It seemed to her impatience as if he would never return.

"Oh! why does he not come back?" thought Adèle, repiningly. "Why does he not come! Has anything happened to him?" Dark and melancholy fancies haunted her—her heart sank within her bosom. She rose, she went to the window and looked out; she came back and sat down, and still she felt unable to rest. She thought she would go down to the garden; that the stillness of the night would calm her fevered blood. With a sort of haste she went down at once. Half-way on the staircase, she met Isabella going up to her bedroom with a light in her hand; it shone on her pale face; its rigidity struck Adèle. She could not help saying, as she paused before her sister-in-law:

"Are you unwell, Isabella? does anything ail you?"

A smile of scorn curled Isabella's pale lips.

"I am well," she said, "and nothing ails me."

She passed on, but not without having first measured Adèle, from head to foot, with a look of so much aversion, that it confounded Mr. Osborne's wife. Isabella did not heed this, she continued ascending the staircase; soon her door closed above.

Adèle remained standing where Miss Osborne had left her, not so much offended as perplexed.

"What can have happened?" she thought again. She suddenly changed her resolve, and instead of going down to the garden, she opened the door of the drawing-room, by which she was standing, and where she had heard the voices of Capitaine Joseph and Mrs. Osborne, conversing.

Their discourse abruptly ceased on her entrance. She gave them a look of mingled pain and surprise, and she could not help saying, with marked emphasis:

"I am interrupting you."

"Oh! no," coldly replied Mrs. Osborne, "but it is so late. Good-night." And with the remote look she had assumed since the afternoon, she left the room.

Adèle went to the central table, and stood by it for a while, then suddenly looking up at her brother-in-law, she said:

"Capitaine Joseph, what does all this mean—what has happened to-day?"

Capitaine Joseph stared amazed.

"Happened!" he echoed; "why, nothing has happened, surely."

She looked at him earnestly.

"I cannot say," she replied; "but I have always felt as if I had a friend in you; that is why I question you."

She spoke very simply, but that very simplicity only moved the more the soft heart of Capitaine Joseph. He knew, too, that she said the truth: he

was her friend, and the only friend she had in his family. He had been defending and excusing her the whole evening to his mother and sister; but with little success: the jealous wrath of Isabella, the calm resentment of Mrs. Osborne, had repelled all his arguments: Adèle had remained guilty, and had been condemned without appeal. "He will find her out yet," had been the vindictive prophecy of Isabella. Mrs. Osborne's quiet "time will show my stepson the truth," was more ladylike, but meant as much.

Capitaine Joseph's own private opinion of the matter was, that the letter was real, not forged, but that Monsieur de Launay would deny all knowledge of it, and that Mr. Osborne would wisely believe the denial. He was willing enough to serve Adèle, but to betray her husband's secrets to her would not have been to serve her. Accordingly, and with more amazement than before, he asked:

"Why, what should have happened?"

"Nothing, I dare say," she sighed; "but I feel as if some calamity hung over me to-night."

She sank down in the chair Mrs. Osborne had left vacant, and pressed her hand to her brow with an expression of trouble and pain unusual to her joyous and happy temper. Capitaine Joseph could not help dropping a hint.

"Well, well," he said, cheerfully, "calamity is not coming near you; but if it should come, if you should want a friend, you know you have one in Capitaine Joseph."

He spoke with some earnestness; to his surprise

Adèle raised her head, and laughed joyously in his face.

"And my husband," she said, gaily, "where would he be? my best friend! My friend for life. Oh, no, Capitaine Joseph, I can have no friend in that sense, whilst he lives. If he should die," she added, in a lower tone, "I shall need none, for I shall die too."

"Humph!" sceptically said Capitaine Joseph, not very well pleased at being so cavalierly put off. "Ladies are very sorry when their husbands die,—very sorry, but they do not always die themselves; the world would end if they did."

Adèle laughed, and did not justify herself, but she looked a little mischievously at Capitaine Joseph, as pretty women are apt to look at old bachelors—kindly, but gently mocking.

"She is a very pert little thing," thought Capitaine Joseph, decidedly piqued; but when he saw her so light, so gay, so trusting, when he remembered on what a chance the happiness of her whole life hung, pique yielded to sudden compassion. "Poor little thing!" he thought, "it might be better to warn her—but how?"

He suddenly raised his head, and drawing a deep sigh, he observed—

"I must bid you good night! I have a painful duty to perform to-night—an *auto-da-fé*."

Adèle opened her eyes.

"Yes," solemnly resumed Capitaine Joseph, "I repeat it an *auto-da-fé*. Some ten years ago, a lovely woman wrote to me; I preserved her letters with

tender respect; but this night they must be burned —her repose requires this painful sacrifice."

"Why so?" asked Adèle.

"She is married," said Capitaine Joseph, in a low tone; "I expect her husband shortly; there is nothing in those letters that can offend him, but they were written before marriage—never meant to meet his eye, and he is jealous as a tiger; the letters must be burned."

"But how does he know anything about them?" was the natural question.

"An enemy warned him that I had received and kept these letters."

"How did the enemy know it?"

"Hem! the enemy must have suspected it, for I was discreet as the grave."

Adèle did not look pleased.

"You have not been discreet," she said, positively, "or it would not have been known. You should have burned the letters when she married: she did not ask them back, because she trusted to your honour. You have not behaved well, Capitaine Joseph."

Capitaine Joseph felt and looked rather disconcerted; nevertheless he attempted justification.

"The truth is," he said, "that an enemy stole one of those letters from me, and sent it to the husband."

"But why did you keep them?" said Adèle, frowning.

"You forget," he replied, "that they were infinitely dear to me—that my only consolation was to read them, and weep."

Adèle reddened, and interrupted him.

"What, take pleasure in reading the letters of a woman who was another man's wife! Ah, how wrong!"

She spoke with serious and solemn simplicity, and looked in his face with such modest reproof that Capitaine Joseph wondered what foolish good nature had tempted him to bring all this upon himself, for there was something in the manner of Adèle that put him, *bon grè mal grè*, on the defensive.

"It was not pleasure I took in them," he said, "but pain. She was lost to me."

"It is no use speaking so, Capitaine Joseph; you know you were wrong, very wrong; and, indeed, you must have been negligent about those letters, or no one would have stolen one of them from you."

"The fact is," said Capitaine Joseph, thinking it better to drop invention, "that this was not a stolen but an intercepted letter, meant for me indeed, but which I never received; but what am I saying?—it is one of my letters, yes, that is it, which she never received, you understand."

"Not quite well," said Adèle. "I thought it was her letter; you said so."

"I dare say I did. This whole affair drives me distracted. Imagine my feelings. I shall have to deny ever having written that letter. I shall have to give up her letters to the friend whom she will send for them—"

"I thought you were to burn them?" said Adèle, looking surprised.

"I should prefer it; but if she sends a dear and

trusted friend to claim them in her name, I must give them up, must I not? Come, imagine the case to be yours. Which would you, if you were the lady, prefer?—to have the letters burned by your old lover, or given up—sealed, of course—to a tender and delicate friend, who would place them, say in the drawer of your work-table, and never seem to know anything about them. You could have the pleasure of burning them yourself, leisurely, privately, comfortably, eh?"

Adèle gave him a look of quiet surprise; she thought his manner odd—his story confused and perplexed; but he had asked her advice, and she gave it.

"Burn the letters yourself, Capitaine Joseph; the friend might lose them."

"And fire tells no tales. True, I shall burn them at once!" he added, not sorry to leave the room. But Adèle detained him.

"You will not read them again, will you?" she said, persuasively, "it is not fair to that lady. Remember, that when she wrote them, she did not think she should marry her present husband. It is not fair to have kept them, and it would not be fair to read them."

Capitaine Joseph did not know what to think. Was Adèle a consummate actress, or did she feel so secure that she had not understood him? He looked at her; her look was as simple as her manner.

"On my word I shall not read them again," said Capitaine Joseph, laying his hand on his heart.

Adèle gave him an approving smile, and thus they

parted. She remained alone in the drawing-room, and with solitude returned her troubled and anxious thoughts.

"Oh! I wish he would come," she exclaimed aloud, "I wish he would."

She went to one of the drawing-room windows, and raised the heavy crimson curtain. The night was dark, the road was silent, eleven struck in the church of Nantua. "Perhaps he will come through the garden," suddenly thought Adèle. At once she left the room, ran down the staircase and crossed the garden.

The air was oppressively warm. A sullen-looking moon had arisen; she shone beyond yellow clouds or sank in their misty depths, and allowed them to veil her sad aspect. "What ails you?" thought Adèle, looking up at her. "You, too, look troubled with some nameless sorrow; you, too, wander through the night like one seeking and never finding rest. Ah! if he came, all would be right. You might hide in your clouds or look from behind them—I should not care about you then."

She had reached the steps that led to the lake. The hour and the spot recalled that night of torment and happiness, when her husband had come to her there, and charmed away her doubts and her jealous sorrow. Happy remembrance. Brief pleasure! Soon returned the troubled mood.

"Perhaps he came back by the road, after all," she thought; "perhaps he is wondering where I am."

Lightly she ran through the alleys, and reached

the house breathless. At the door of the hall she met Jeannette.

"I was looking for Madame!" she said.

"Monsieur is come back?" cried Adèle, with sparkling eyes.

"No, Madame, but he has sent word that he will not come back to-night. The messenger is just gone."

The face of Adèle fell; but she soon rallied. She knew, at least, that nothing had happened to her husband. What more did she want? He had not been able to return. All was as it should be. Still she felt sad.

"It is no use staying up," she said, with a sigh; "yet I do not think I can sleep."

"Shall I try and send Madame to sleep with one of my old stories?" asked Jeannette, dubiously.

"Yes, do, and undress me to-night. I will not have Madame Leroy. Tell her so. She teases me. —You need not tell her that," she added, looking round with a smile.

"Oh! why did he not come back?" she thought, pausing on the staircase. "Why did he not come back?"

She slowly went up to her room. Jeannette found her sitting languidly in a chair, and had some trouble in persuading her young mistress to undress and go to bed. At length Adèle yielded, and in a few minutes her head lay on her pillow. Jeannette carefully put the light away, so that it might not offend her eyes, and sitting down at the foot of the bed, she asked gravely—

"What story shall I tell Madame?"

"Any story you like, Jeannette, but not a horrible one. Something like Alcestis, or your young master, but nothing about my lady Philippa or Louis the Wicked; but it may be as sad as you wish. I think I should like to cry."

A sigh half stifled the last words. Jeannette heard, but did not rightly understand.

"Mademoiselle—Madame, I mean—wonders that my old stories are sad; but happy things are forgotten and the sorrowful alone are remembered. I do know a story, not a very long one, which would be no story at all if it were not sad. It is not about Alcestis, nor about my young master, nor about great and wicked people, but about a poor peasant girl, who died before I was born."

"What was her name?"

"Her name was Catherine. I call her poor, because poor Catherine has remained a byeword; but poor she was not born; her father was a farmer, and Catherine was his only child. I have never seen her, of course, but I have so often heard her described, that I know her quite well. She was a handsome girl, with blue eyes and fair hair, and cheeks like the rose. She was tall too, and the very turn of her neck would have made you know her anywhere. Well, Catherine was about twelve or so, when standing one evening at her father's door, she saw a poor beggar boy pass. He was thin and haggard, and sunburnt; he was lame too, and could scarcely walk. 'Wait awhile, poor little fellow,' says Catherine; in she runs to the house and fetches him bread and

cheese to eat, and milk to drink, and he ate and drank like one starving. Well, the father of Catherine comes up and he talks o the lad, and, to make a long story short, he took Pierre, his name was Pierre, and he was a poor orphan, from Roches, I have been told; well, he took Pierre into the house and kept him till his foot was well, and then offered him work on his farm, if he would stay. The boy was honest and not lazy: he remained. Well, Catherine grew up, and so did Pierre. She became a beauty, and he was still a poor, sheepish fellow, whom every one liked for his kind heart. Surely women are odd. Catherine might have had any one in her own rank, but no one save that Pierre would do for her. She so set her heart upon him, that her father let her have her way, and, as he was getting old, he made interest with the owner of his farm, and had it given to Pierre; and scarcely had the poor old man done that, when he died. Well it was for him. He had been dead some time, and they were to be married soon, when Pierre fell ill, and a sad complaint it was then and is still. He had the smallpox. Catherine was like mad; night and day she sat with him, till he was well again; Pierre was what he had ever been, neither uglier nor handsomer, but Catherine fell ill in her turn: true she did not die, but she lost all her beauty. Ah! she was sorely cut up, but Pierre comforted her. She was as handsome as ever in his eyes, he said, and, handsome or ugly, she was still his own Catherine."

"Why do you call that story sad, Jeannette?"

said Adèle, smiling; "that is love, you know. If I were to lose all my beauty, do you think he would love me less? He would love me more, Jeannette. Oh, how hot this night is! I hope we shall have no storm to-morrow to prevent him from returning. Look out, Jeannette, and tell me if the stars are shining."

Jeannette rose and went to the window; she raised the curtain and looked.

"I see the light of the moon on the road," she said, "but I see not one star in the sky."

Adèle sighed.

"The moon may shine," she said, "but I do not like black nights without stars. Oh, Jeannette! he has spoiled me; would you believe it, I feel wretched because he did not come back this evening?"

She raised her hand to veil her eyes that overflowed with tears. Jeannette resumed her chair at the foot of the bed, and said, after a pause—

"Can Madame sleep now, or shall I go on with the story of Catherine?"

"Is it not finished?" asked Adèle, looking round; "why, what more is there to say? They married and were happy, like people in fairy tales."

Jeannette shook her head.

"Life is not like a fairy tale, Madame. Catherine was getting stronger, but she still kept her room, when one day—it was a warm day, too—she fell asleep. The voices of Pierre and Lise talking in the next room awoke her; Lise was a cousin of hers, the widow of a soldier, who had come to take care of Catherine. She was a handsome woman, too, but

bold and forward. Well, she and Pierre were talking, and Pierre was saying, 'I tell you that though I would as soon see my funeral as my wedding-day, I shall marry Catherine when the time comes.' Lise cried sorely, and upbraided him with having deceived her, but Pierre did not give in. 'I like you best,' he said, 'but I shall marry her.' Catherine was not strong, but there are things that would rouse the dead from their graves. She got up out of her bed, dressed herself, and walked out of the house that hour. She went to an old aunt of hers that lived hard by, and stayed there. The beggar whom she had fed at her father's door remained master of her father's house; the man whom she had minded in his sickness married the handsome widow."

"Ah! he never liked her," cried Adèle, with passionate vehemence, "never—never."

"Yes, he did," said Jeannette; "but as men like women, and that is not as women like men,—oh, no, Madame. Well, the story is not ended yet; Catherine was poor now, and had to live by spinning; the whole day long she sat and spun at her aunt's door, and by that door Pierre had to pass every day. He never looked at her,—never once, but he saw her well enough. He was rich, he had a good farm, a handsome wife, and two fine boys; but he was not happy, for Catherine sat spinning at her door. She was there like a ghost, and he wore away to nothing, like a haunted man. People said it was remorse and shame, but it was not, it was something else. He had been married five years, when he found out one day that Lise was not his

wife, that her husband was living when he married her. How he discovered that I cannot say, but he knew it and every one else along with him; but as the husband was really dead now, there was no one but thought he would marry Lise at once. Not he. He went to Catherine as she sat spinning at her door as usual; he spoke to her for the first time for five years, and it was to tell her that he loved her, that he could not live without her, and that he would and should marry her. Catherine did not answer, but she got up and went into the house and locked the door. For a whole month Pierre was like a madman about that house, but he never so much as got a sight of Catherine. At the end of the month he gave it up; he went and married Lise, who, though she was half mad with spite, was obliged to take him for her own sake; and the day after he married her, he went and threw himself into the lake. So you see, Madame, that he did love her, after all."

"Ah, do not call that love, Jeannette, and tell me no more such stories. Let lovers die, but let love live. I will not believe that when a woman's beauty goes, the man's affection goes with it. It would break my heart to think of such a thing. I hate that Pierre, who liked two women and was true to neither."

"He never liked but Catherine, Madame; his love cooled awhile when she lost her, beauty, but he still loved her, and the chance of having her, and the misery of not getting her, were too much for him in the end. Well, there is little more to say. He had married Lise for the sake of his children, and

his children never enjoyed their father's inheritance. They died young, and the sons of Lise by a third husband had the land and the farm. Catherine went on spinning for a few years, then died too. She never held up her head after Pierre was found in the lake. He was a suicide, and was buried by two cross roads; but she was a good christian, and she was laid in the churchyard with christian dead. All that happened before I was born; I remember Lise, a stout, red-faced old woman, with rings on all her fingers. I remember, too, the spot where Pierre was buried. I have been told that Catherine often went and sat by it moaning the year before she died; and the old people, when I was a child, used to shake their heads and say, that long after she was dead and buried, she might be seen sitting there on cold moonlight nights wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, and lamenting for his lost soul; but God alone knows if it was true."

"Oh, Jeannette, Jeannette, why did you tell me this story?" asked Adèle, with passionate repining. "I am young and handsome, and beloved—I will not hear such things. I, too, might have the small pox and be disfigured, but he would only love me the better. Oh, Jeannette, you do not know—no one knows what he is to me—what I am to him."

"God forbid that anything in what I have said should ever apply to Madame," fervently said Jeannette. "God forbid!"

"Well, then, tell me some other story—I want to forget this one. Let it be a love story if you like, and a sad one; let the lovers be unhappy, let sor-

row, sickness, calamity fall upon them—but let them be faithful and true, Jeannette."

She spoke with a smile, and leaned on her elbow, looking at the old woman. Jeannette turned up her eyes and searched in her thoughts; but vainly. She shook her head and rose.

"Some other evening I shall, I dare say, find such a story as Madame wishes for, but this evening I cannot. In all the stories that I remember, the lover is either faithless, or the mistress betrays him, or they forget one another."

Adèle sank back impatiently.

"How tiresome you are, Jeannette. What, not one story of two faithful lovers!"

"Not one," said Jeannette—"but what about it? I shall find one for some other evening."

"He will be here some other evening," said Adèle, petulantly, "and what shall I care about stories then? He tells me beautiful love stories, better than yours, Jeannette."

"Perhaps Monsieur invents them," stiffly said Jeannette; "mine are all true. Does Madame wish for anything?"

"Look out and tell me if the stars are shining."

Jeannette raised the curtain again, and looked out.

"The moon is set," she said; "the night is dark, and there is not one star in the sky."

"I do not care," said Adèle, turning her face to the wall, "he will come back to-morrow."

Jeannette looked at the flushed face of her little mistress, and sighed as she left the room.

"She is too fond of him," she thought. "It is

well to love one's husband, but to be in that state because he is away one night, it is too much. And yet that was the very way the little Countess went on about my young master. Ah! what does Madame mean by saying the world is going away?" thought Jeannette, pausing on the staircase. "It goes round and round, and is for ever the same again. The old remember, and the young love."

CHAPTER XII.

CAPITAINE JOSEPH'S ERRAND.

THERE had been a storm in the night, and grey was the next morning. A cloudy sky, misty hills, and a wet road greeted the eyes of Adèle when she awoke and looked out. "He will come back all the same," she thought. The only question was, would he return early or late. It was scarcely day as yet, the house was still, no one was up; as usual, Adèle stole down to her husband's sitting-room, but scarcely had she crossed the threshold, when a circumstance, which her eye at once detected as strange, struck her: the door that led to the rooms adjoining this one, and which a drapery habitually concealed, was wide open. Who had displaced the heavy tapestry hanging?—who had ordered the door of that unused chamber to be opened? Adèle crossed the room, she entered the neighbouring apartment. The windows were securely closed, but a wax light burning on a table scarcely dispelled the gloom of the place. Before her, high and spectral, rose the lofty couch

which she had found in the lumber room. The end of the heavy coverlet swept the floor, the pillows were tossed and tumbled; the bed had been slept in. "He is come back, and he slept here," thought Adèle. A slight noise behind made her turn round with a beating heart; but it was only Jeannette.

"Where is he?—where is your master?" eagerly asked Adèle.

"Monsieur is gone out again."

The face of Adèle fell.

"Gone out again!" she echoed; "but he left some message. What was it?"

Jeannette shook her head. Monsieur had left no message.

"Gone out again!" said Adèle, "at what o'clock did he come back last night?"

"I met Monsieur below, as I left Madame's room."

"And you did not come and tell me," indignantly cried Adèle.

"Monsieur positively forbade me to disturb Madame," replied Jeannette, "and he told me to prepare this room for him, and I did, of course—servants must obey."

Adèle clasped her hands, and slowly shook her head like one amazed.

"Something has happened," she thought; "something which he does not want me to know—How did he look?" she asked, aloud.

"Monsieur is always pale," replied Jeannette; "but he put his hand to his forehead once or twice —perhaps his head ached."

In vain Adèle questioned her again and again—Jeannette knew no more.

"I dare say he will come back to breakfast," thought and said Adèle, endeavouring to persuade herself that nothing strange had occurred, that everything was as it should be.

But Mr. Osborne did not appear at breakfast, and Adèle took that meal with her mother and her sister-in-law. The two ladies were solemnly grave.

"Is not William well?" asked Mrs. Osborne, glancing at his vacant place.

"Mr. Osborne is out," replied Adèle.

"I thought he had done with business," said Isabella, with a sneer.

"Perhaps it is not on business he has gone out," said Adèle, trying to smile.

"There were the strangest noises in the house all night," observed Mrs. Osborne, after a pause, "exactly under my room—what can it have been?"

"Mr. Osborne did not like to disturb me, and slept in the room below yours," replied Adèle, quietly; "that was the noise you heard, I dare say. He came home very late."

"I really do not think he can have slept at all," continued Mrs. Osborne. "I think he must have been walking about all night."

"He was composing a love sonnet to Adèle," said Isabella, and she laughed.

"My dear!" gravely said her mother.

Adèle looked at them both, and laid down her cup. What did the emphatic, pointed speech of Mrs. Osborne—what did the undisguised insolence

of Isabella, mean? She leaned her elbow upon the table, and glanced from the mother to the daughter, and from the daughter to the mother back again.

"You both have a meaning," she said; "pray what is it?"

They were mute. She resumed:

"I am sorry, for your sakes, it is not a meaning that can be avowed."

Isabella rose and confronted her.

"You may learn it yet," she said.

Mrs. Osborne, too, rose.

"It is not my habit," she observed, with dignified reserve, "to interfere between a husband and his wife, to betray the secrets of the one to the other."

Adèle did not change her attitude, but looked at them both, with a secure, imprudent smile.

"Why, who could interfere between him and me?" she asked.

"Isabella, my dear, we shall soon leave this house —had we not better leave the room?" asked Mrs Osborne, turning to her daughter.

"You know I did not wish to enter it," replied Isabella, haughtily.

Mrs. Osborne took her daughter's arm, and they both sailed out.

"I defy you," thought Adèle, looking after them. "He is mine, I defy you; do your worst—as I know you will." But, like them, she rose and left the room, without caring to finish her breakfast.

"The ladies have been quarrelling," thought Capitaine Joseph, when he at length came down and saw the table vacant, and the three cups of coffee

standing half full. "When people do not eat," added Capitaine Joseph, sitting down, "mischief is brewing." And being most pacifically inclined, he made, though alone, a hearty breakfast.

"He will come back to dinner," thought Adèle the whole day; but dinner-time came, and Mr. Osborne did not return. She scarcely expected that Mrs. and Miss Osborne would appear at the dinner-table after the scene of the morning; but they did; Mrs. Osborne through policy, Isabella through pride, had thought it best not to forsake the battle-field. Besides, Mr. Osborne's prolonged absence was an omen and a sign fatal in their eyes to the power of the wife.

When and how the storm would break, they could not tell: but it was brooding; sooner or later it would burst over her devoted head.

"The situation is growing awkward," thought Capitaine Joseph, looking round, and he was wondering by what discourse he could best enliven the formality of the forthcoming meal, when the door opened, and Jean appeared, not with the dinner, but with a message; Mr. Osborne wished to speak to Capitaine Joseph, for a moment.

"By all means!" was the prompt reply.

"Ah! he is come back—thank God!" cried Adèle, unable in her joy to think of anything else.

Capitaine Joseph found Mr. Osborne in his sitting-room. He was struck with his pale and haggard aspect, but he kept his thoughts to himself. Without preface or apology, like one too much absorbed by one thought to heed anything else, Mr. Osborne

entered at once on the matter that had made him summon his brother-in-law.

"I have a favour to ask of you," he said. "I have an appointment with Monsieur de Launay this evening, you must have the kindness to keep it for me. I am ill, and cannot go."

"Certainly," readily answered his half-brother; "you do not look well at all; besides, a third person is best in these matters."

Without heeding him, Mr. Osborne continued—

"To-morrow morning he leaves France for Belgium. You see how fatal delay might be."

"Rely upon me. I shall see him to-night—even though it should be in his bedroom."

"He will try to shun you as he has shunned me yesterday, this morning, and to-day; listen to no excuses."

Capitaine Joseph smoothed his moustache, and smiled.

"Consider the thing as done," he said.

"Eight is the hour," resumed Mr. Osborne; "be punctual to the minute, or he will avail himself of the remission to get out of this. I wrote to him, I sent in messages, and if I had not met him by chance I should not have wrung this appointment from him. He was riding with some ladies, and I could not insist on immediate explanation; but I compelled him to say that he could see me at eight, and were it not that I am physically unable to go," added Mr. Osborne, "at eight—he should see me." He pressed his hand to his forehead, and looked very ill indeed.

"At eight he shall see me," said Capitaine Joseph. "What am I to say?"

Mr. Osborne took the letter he had received the preceding day from his pocket, and placing it in his half-brother's hand, he said:

"You will ask him if he wrote this?"

Capitaine Joseph carefully put the letter away, and looked thoughtful.

"In everything, let us look at the end," he said; "Monsieur de Launay will grant that he wrote the letter, deny that he wrote the letter, or decline answering the question you choose to put through me —what then?"

Mr. Osborne frowned, and looked impatient.

"You misunderstand me completely," he said; "I have no quarrel with Monsieur de Launay. That letter, if true, was written when my wife was nothing to me—when Monsieur de Launay and Mademoiselle de Courcelles barely knew of my existence; her right to receive, his to write, I do not deny."

"Then why rake up this old matter?"

"Why! because she must and shall be justified—because the letter is a shameful forgery, the work of a hidden foe, which Monsieur de Launay shall help me to discover; I tell you that he knows or suspects something of this, I saw it in his face; if he is an accomplice—I hope, for his sake, that he is not—he shall rue it dearly. But, for the present, I have no quarrel with him. I simply wish to know if this letter is in his handwriting—about its contents I do not trouble him. I do not dream of questioning his

right to write it, but I want to know if he wrote it. You understand?"

He laid his hand on Capitaine Joseph's shoulder, and looked impressively in his face.

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Capitaine Joseph, and internally he added—

"Wilful men will have their way; it will not end well for poor little Adèle; but wilful men will have their way."

"And what are you two doing in here?" exclaimed the petulant voice of Adèle, as, unable to control her impatience, she opened the door, and looked in.

Mr. Osborne turned round; the light of the window fell on his face; its deadly pallor, its haggard expression, made his wife utter an expression of alarm.

"You are ill!" she cried, springing towards him.

"I am not very well," he answered, quietly; "it is nothing, do not mind it. I have delayed the dinner long enough; shall we not go in?"

He turned to leave the room. She took his arm, and looked up in his face.

"Why did you come back so late?" she asked, whilst Capitaine Joseph discreetly walked away.

"I was delayed."

"Why did you sleep below in that cold room?"

"I dreaded heat; my head ached; I thought the cool would do me good."

"Where have you been all day?"

"At Nantua."

She had time to put no further questions; they

had reached the door of the dining-room ; he opened it wide ; they entered together. Her arm still rested on his ; Mrs. Osborne and her daughter exchanged a glance : the storm had not broken yet.

The meal began ; colder and more formal it was than had been that of the preceding day. Mrs. Osborne and Isabella did not open their lips. Capitaine Joseph thought it more prudent to be silent. The looks of his mother and sister, of the latter especially, told him they were getting impatient for the catastrophe, and that two or three unadvised words might produce it. Adèle looked wistfully at her husband, who touched nothing ; he spoke but once.

" How is Lilian ?" he said, turning to her.

" Lilian is well," she replied, pushing her plate away.

His altered looks, his silence, his coldness, made her heart swell. She saw Isabella smile ; she saw Mrs. Osborne look steadily at her stepson ; she saw Capitaine Joseph give her a compassionate glance ; and unable to control her emotion, she rose from the table.

" Are you not well ?" at once asked her husband.

" My head aches," she said.

She went and sat down on a remote couch. He, too, left the table, but he did not go near her ; he took up a newspaper, and went to one of the windows, where he read for a while by the declining light.

" He looks dreadfully ill," murmured Mrs. Osborne.

" He believes it in his heart," said Isabella ; " he may deny it—I tell you he believes it."

With resentful triumph she looked at her sister-in-law; the look fell harmless on Adèle; her hand shaded her eyes. "He believes it," continued Isabella, addressing her own thoughts, "he knows it." Her glance reverted to her brother's pale and haggard face. "He pitied me; I think I may pity him now." She watched him with moody attention. Suddenly Mr. Osborne looked up from his paper, and fastened on his wife a look so troubled and so strange that it was well Adèle did not see it; then he paced the Hall up and down, like one who strives against a feverish dream.

"I shall see what there is in that paper," thought Miss Osborne. She rose, and deliberately went and took it from the chair where Mr. Osborne had laid it. Eagerly did Isabella look over the "Courrier de L'Ain." With impatient avidity she read it through from the title-page to the name of the printer. The dull leader about the electoral law, the trite news of the place, the insipid feuilleton, did not stop her. Yet she found nothing, not a word, not an allusion, that could apply to Adèle, to Monsieur de Launay, or to Mr. Osborne. "What can it have been?" she thought. She looked up abstractedly, gnawing her lip with secret disappointment.

Adèle had risen, and was then in the act of leaving the room. The door opened and closed upon her, and Mr. Osborne neither looked at his wife, nor showed any inclination to follow her out. He was talking apart with Capitaine Joseph; and Mrs. Osborne, sitting back in a deep chair, was watching the speakers—hear them she could not—with calm attention.

"Ah, bah!" said Capitaine Joseph, aloud, as he turned away from Mr. Osborne, "you may say what you like, the law will never pass."

He went to the table, poured himself out a glass of wine, drank it slowly, took out a cigar, and nodding to Mrs. Osborne, who took no notice of the salutation, he walked out, humming an air.

Mr. Osborne remained a few minutes behind, then without looking at his mother or sister, he, too, left the room. At once, and with unusual rapidity of motion, Mrs. Osborne was by her daughter's side.

"Where is Joseph going?" she asked.

"Ay," replied Isabella, looking her mother in the face; "where is he going?"

They said no more. The front gate of the Manor had opened and closed again; a brisk foot had descended the flight of stone steps; the figure of Capitaine Joseph appeared on the solitary road. He gave a rapid look around, then walked on at quick rate. Isabella threw down the newspaper and sprang to the door of the Hall; her mother as rapidly followed, and the inner congratulations of Capitaine Joseph on the clever manner in which he had managed were not half over, when he was suddenly arrested: he looked round; his sister stood on his left, his mother on his right.

"Joseph, where are you going?" severely asked Mrs. Osborne.

"He is going to the Château de Launay, let him deny it if he can," said Isabella, with open wrath.

"I am going to purchase cigars in Nantua," pla-

cidly replied Capitaine Joseph; "I never had such cigars; and as I am going away to-morrow morning—by-the-way, I hope you have not forgotten to prepare for our journey? What hour shall we leave at? Six too early? seven or eight ditto—nine, eleven—one more suitable, eh?"

"I shall not leave Courcelles to-morrow," said Mrs. Osborne.

"Nor I," immoveably said Isabella.

"Would I might echo 'nor I,'" sighed Capitaine Joseph; "but my leave is out, go I must. This is a lovely evening, and were you not both bareheaded, I should suggest a walk with me along the road."

"Where are you going?" imperiously said Isabella.

"To purchase cigars in Nantua," he phlegmatically replied.

His mother withdrew the hand she had laid on the shoulder of her elder son; coldly her cold blue eyes looked into his, and frigidly she said—

"Joseph, you are a fool—you should let this matter go on without you; you will get shy looks and secret hate for your pains."

"I protest I do not understand," began Capitaine Joseph, with a look of great innocence.

"What!" exclaimed Isabella, interrupting his protest, "what shall so devoted a knight allow so good an opportunity of deceiving a husband's trust, of screening a wife's folly, to slip by? Impossible!"

"Is it possible," cried Capitaine Joseph, turning

up his eyes, "that a man cannot go and purchase a dozen of cigars——"

"Cigars!" indignantly began Isabella.

Her mother checked her.

"Come in, Isabella," she said, gravely; "our place is not here. Joseph, I fear you are the foe, not the friend, of your family. You go to the strong side; you are worldly wise," added the unworldly lady; "you do well."

They gave him resentful looks and turned away. Unmoved by this parting taunt, Capitaine Joseph walked on. This little scene left him neither surprised nor discomposed. "Trust women for making a house hot if they can," was all he thought.

Capitaine Joseph went on with the complacency of one whom this task did not affect; Mr. Osborne remained behind with the tormenting irritation of one to whom its issue was vital.

"It is impossible!" he thought, as he sat alone in his study, "it is impossible; I cannot, I will not believe it."

He rose to walk about the room, but sudden giddiness compelled him to resume his seat. He pressed his hand to his forehead, he tried to concentrate and master thought, but could not; he forbade a tormenting suspicion to come near him, and it returned, and with it images which he could neither fix nor control, which wandered like troubled spirits through his aching brain. He rose again, and again he sat down; the light of the lamp shone on his pale face; his fixed eyes gazed on the half gloom of the room. They saw a spectre hovering there—Doubt biding

his hour. In vain, with all the might of his will, the husband of Adèle repelled that insidious foe; in vain he dared him to advance one step further, and defied him to prevail; the subtle enemy laughed at all his wrath, and, like a tempter, still haunted his vigil.

"Remember," he murmured in his ear, "she was very free with you; remember that. Yet you were a man, a young man and a stranger; remember."

"Innocence is fearless," he replied, "and she was innocent as Eve before the fall."

"Innocent! who is innocent? Of all the sons of Adam, one alone was found without sin, and He was a God. Of all the daughters of Eve, one alone was stainless, and she was His mother. Who can be called innocent? Not one on this wide earth—not one."

"But she was pure—pure as a child."

"She was a woman, not an angel. Call her child, if you like. She was a wilful, spoiled child, who derided the quiet reserve, who broke through the slight but wise barriers with which custom guards her sex. True, you were incapable of abusing the trust, but was another? you would never have led her into indiscretion, and from indiscretion into sin, but would you answer for the Baron de Launay?"

"He dare not, for his life he dare not."

"And who was there to terrify him, to guard her? He dare not? What will not man's cupidity, what will not man's passion, dare? He may have known that she was rich, he must have seen that she was beautiful. That he admired her as your wife, you know. You were too proud to be jealous, too secure;

but did you like it? Remember the looks you have often seen; remember the jealous hate of Isabella—remember."

"Will that man never come?" thought Mr. Osborne, as nine struck; "would I had gone myself."

"She loves you now," still murmured the tempter; "but did she love you when she married you? She wished herself dead a month after her wedding-day—have you forgotten it? Remember her long coldness—remember the misery written in her face—was it grief for her lost lover, was it remorse for having deceived you? Have no faith in her youth for the past. It is the young who fall most readily. Trust her not on account of her love for you in the present, that very love will urge her to deceive you. Do not take her word, do not believe her. She loves you very much, very much; she would forswear her soul rather than lose you."

"I am getting delirious," thought Mr. Osborne, as he felt his thoughts wandering more and more away from his control. He took up a book and looked at it steadily; but still that voice haunted him.

"Remember his guilty face this morning—remember his guilty look. And if he is guilty, can she be innocent?"

"Will that man never come?" again thought Mr. Osborne, throwing down his book. With more vehemence than lover ever longed for the presence of his mistress, he longed for the return of Capitaine Joseph. Nine had long struck, and now half-past nine, and ten followed it, and Mr. Osborne, unable to bear

more, rose, left his room, and went to the Hall to wait there. Even before he reached the door, he heard voices within, and in one of them he at once recognized the tones of Capitaine Joseph. Mr. Osborne opened the door and stood for a moment on the threshold. Capitaine Joseph stood between his mother and his sister, defending himself as best he might.

"You wrong me, Joseph," feelingly said Mrs. Osborne, with her handkerchief to her eyes, "if you suppose that my motives for inquiring into this are any save the purest. But the peace, the honour of our family, are at stake."

"But what have I to do with all this?" asked Capitaine Joseph, turning up his eyes. "I went to Nantua to buy——"

"He is mocking us," interrupted the short, irritated voice of Isabella. "Does he think we are blind fools, like William? I tell you,"—she paused abruptly on seeing her brother, who came forward, pale and indignant. He looked bitterly at his mother and sister, but without addressing them, he turned to Capitaine Joseph.

"You have been long away," he said; "and I, too, like the ladies, was getting impatient for your return."

"William, you wrong me," began Mrs. Osborne; "I only wished——"

"To know before I did what reply Capitaine Joseph brought me — the wish was natural and praiseworthy; Isabella, too, shared in your anxiety. You are both too kind."

"I wished to know the truth," said Isabella, boldly; "the truth, and no made-up story."

Mr. Osborne looked at Capitaine Joseph.

"You hear that," he said; "your mother and your sister ask for the truth, and for no made-up story. Pray speak."

Capitaine Joseph coughed, and looked on thorns.

"I protest," he said; "I cannot imagine what all this is about. I went to Nantua to buy cigars."

"You went to the Château De Launay," said Isabella, "and you know what you went there for."

"That girl is possessed," thought Capitaine Joseph.

Mr. Osborne sank down in a chair and smiled.

"You hear that, Capitaine Joseph," he said; "you went to the Château De Launay."

"They are all possessed," growled Capitaine Joseph, between his teeth, but he did not answer.

"Speak," continued Mr. Osborne, "I wish for no secret—for no mystery."

Capitaine Joseph did not reply.

"The accusation has been public and open," calmly pursued Mr. Osborne, "and public and open shall be the defence. What did Monsieur de Launay say?"

"Wilful men will have their way," grumbled Capitaine Joseph; but unable to make up his mind to give a straight answer, he said,—

"Say, why he said nothing—what was there to say on such a foolish matter?"

Mr. Osborne frowned and looked impatient.

"Capitaine Joseph," he said, "I wish for no disguise—I wish for the truth, and nothing but the truth."

He spoke with a firmness that mastered both illness and emotion. Mrs. Osborne looked earnestly at her eldest son, and Isabella waited for his reply with jealous watchfulness.

"Poor little Adèle," thought Capitaine Joseph, "her best friend is her worst enemy."

"Ah, bah!" he lightly said, speaking aloud, "how much you all make of a little girl's flirtation! I saw De Launay, spoke to him, and found him a little tender on the subject, like all jilted lovers. The liking, it seems, was all on his side—which is not difficult to believe—he asked, indeed, for meetings, but never got them, and was ultimately thrown by like an old bouquet. Altogether," added Capitaine Joseph, stroking his chin, "I pity that poor De Launay, he really was not well used."

"But he wrote the letter?" said Isabella, looking steadily in her brother's face.

"Oh, yes, of course," carelessly replied Capitaine Joseph.

"You have not told all," she pursued, frowning; "there is more, Joseph."

"Ah, bah!" he said, ironically, and putting his hands behind his back, he walked away to the other end of the room, whistling a march.

Mrs. Osborne looked at her step-son. He sat pale as death, with thick drops of sweat on his brow; his trembling hand wiped them away, but they returned, gathering fast. Yet his eye was firm, and with the calmness of unconquered will he looked around him and spoke slowly and deliberately.

"I do not believe it," he said; "it is a lie from

beginning to end. He may have dared anything in thought or in act, she never so much as knew it—she never so much as cast one look upon him. It is a lie, I say, a lie for which Monsieur de Launay shall be accountable to me yet. It is a lie, and I shall prove it."

His burning look, his pale face, his trembling lip, dared denial. Even Isabella did not venture to utter a word. Once more he looked around him.

"I again desire that my wife may know nothing of this," he said. He rose and left the room. Mrs. Osborne looked at Isabella and smiled. Doubt had entered his heart, and they saw it.

Mr. Osborne went on to his sitting-room. His head swam, his pulse beat with the rapidity of fever. He entered his study, he went to his chair, and sank down in it; he pressed his hand to his head, it felt like a dull, inert mass. "My mind is leaving me," he thought; "I have delayed too long."

"What ails you to-day?" asked a low, fond voice by his side.

He looked up amazed, and the arms of his wife were thrown around him, and her cheek was laid to his. Unable to bear so long and unusual a separation from him, she had conquered her pride and come unasked to his room during his absence.

For a while Mr. Osborne remained mute in her embrace; then trembling with passionate emotion, he rose; he averted his face from hers, he untwined her arms from around him.

"Do not," he said, "do not."

Adèle, too, shook from head to foot.

"Would you prefer being alone?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, still without looking at her or turning round, "I should."

She left the room without another word.

Mr. Osborne went to the door, which his wife had left ajar, to close it and draw the bolt; but a fair hand that interposed itself fearlessly between door and pannelling, thwarted his intention.

"Who is there?" he sharply asked.

"It is I, William," replied his stepmother's voice; "may I not speak to you?"

Mr. Osborne withdrew from the door and allowed her to enter. She came in softly.

"May I speak to you?" she said again, and without waiting for his reply, she continued: "William, I fear you have misunderstood me and my intentions. If I wished to learn from Joseph——"

"We will not speak of that," he interrupted; "you were not more willing to learn than I was that you should know. More you shall learn yet—it is not over; the slander shall die, and the slanderers—but we will not speak of that. I have a favour to ask of you."

Mrs. Osborne bowed her head, and implied that he had only to speak; he fixed his eyes upon her, and resumed:

"You told me yesterday to command you. I am going to put you to the proof now. I feel ill—very ill. I have sent for Docteur Guillaume; he will tell me whether, as I fear, my disease is contagious. Until he comes, Adèle must not approach me. If I lock the door on myself I may alarm her unneces-

sarily. Will you remain here for an hour, and prevent her from entering should she come again, for she may not? You can say, which is true enough, that my head aches."

He spoke slowly, and with evident effort.

"You look very ill indeed, William," said his stepmother, approaching him.

"Do not come too near me," he observed, "there may be danger for you too."

"I fear no contagious disease," she replied, smiling; "and none, if I may judge from past experience, has power over me."

"So I have heard you say, or I should not have requested this favour from you. Nevertheless, be careful. This may be nothing, it may also be dangerous; there are several epidemics abroad, as I read in the newspaper to-day."

"Do not talk so much," she interrupted, "you are growing very pale."

Illness was, indeed, written in his whole aspect. He went to the door of his room and opened it; on the threshold he paused and looked back, and said impressively—

"You will not forget that Adèle is not to come in."

"She shall not," resolutely replied Mrs. Osborne.

"And you will not forget," he continued, "that she is to know nothing of Monsieur de Launay's letter. In due time I shall tell her all, but not now."

Mrs. Osborne laid her hand on her heart.

"William," she said, "you have often wronged

me. You must learn to do me justice now; from me your wife shall know nothing."

"I rely on your word," he said, emphatically.

He entered his room; the door closed upon him. Steadily Mrs. Osborne looked at that closed door.

"I did not ask for his trust," she thought; "what has tempted him to repose trust in me? Were we not antagonists from the day when the boy first saw his father's wife and looked her in the face with secret defiance, from that day until this? Has he not despoiled me and my children? Has he not thwarted and opposed me, and does he think that now, when he voluntarily places himself in my hands, sick and defenceless, does he think that the net he has entered shall not close upon him? You trust me, William, because you cannot help it; anything to spare the loved one, the wife whom you love and hate, deny it though you will. Anything to save from unsightly scars the girlish face that has charmed you so well. You trust me, not because you rely on my honour, but because you defy my power in your heart." She leaned her cheek upon her hand; she paced the room up and down; she seemed, and she was, absorbed in thought.

Ungratified ambition had secretly consumed the heart and the life of this calm, fair woman. There is a crisis in every human existence, and to Mrs. Osborne, who had dreamed of power her whole life long, who had schemed and striven for empire and never been but the conquered subject of an inexorable husband, the toy and tool of unruly children, it now seemed again that her hour was come, an

hour all the sweeter for having been so long delayed. The fortunes of Robert were low, Anna was nothing; the beauty of Isabella had tried to conquer, and had failed miserably; the Osbornes were a decaying family, William alone had survived the storm, and his daughter it could not reach; but what availed it to the younger Osbornes that this elder branch should still be vigorous and flourishing? a strange woman, a girlish wife, had both the master of Courcelles and his child.

"He is ill, and very ill," thought Mrs. Osborne, "and every illness may end with death. If he lives I will have him, if he dies I will have Lilian." The door opening without previous knock or admonition, roused the lady from her reflections. At once she stood by it, and with extended arm she barred the entrance of Adèle.

Full of grief and resentment at his unkindness, the wife of Mr. Osborne had left his presence, but resentment soon cooled, and grief became remorse. "Ah, how passionate and hasty I am!" she thought in the garden, whither she had fled; "how well he may call and treat me like a spoiled child! Could I not see that some great trouble is on him, that some calamity has befallen him, or he would not be strange? Oh, I must go back, not to teaze him with unseasonable fondness, but to learn all that grieves him, to share his grief, whatever it may be, and help him to bear it. Let him be sharp or short with me, I do not care. I am his wife, and I must take him in his wayward moods as well as in the fond and sweet."

At once she left the garden, she went to her husband's study, she entered it without knocking, and she found her mother-in-law forbidding, with a gracious smile, her further entrance.

"Hush!" she said, lightly laying her finger on her lips; "he is asleep."

"Where?" asked Adèle, looking round.

"In the next room, of course. He prefers it—the air is cool and his headache is worse. No—no, you really must not enter," she added, stepping before Adèle, who had attempted to pass on.

"Why so?" asked her daughter-in-law.

"Because he is asleep, my dear."

"I shall make no noise."

And again she attempted to pass.

Mrs. Osborne quietly locked her stepson's room door, and put the key in her pocket. Adèle looked at her in mute amazement. The lady smiled.

"My dear child," she said, "is it possible you do not understand that William wishes to be alone, and has constituted me door-keeper? Come, do not look so surprised, there is nothing in it."

Adèle clasped her hands with some force; fixedly and moodily she looked up in her mother-in-law's face.

"What is it?" she asked; "what does it mean?"

"I fear I have accepted an ungracious office," said Mrs. Osborne, shunning her glance; "but ask to know nothing from me—I have passed my word that I would not speak, that you should not enter."

The blood rushed up to the brow of Adèle; her look lit, her voice, though low, trembled as she replied:

"You want to alarm me—I tell you it is useless; and but that I do not wish to waken him, I would show you how vain and how fruitless is the attempt. I have been forbearing, too forbearing by far, with your children and you; but I am weary of being insulted in my husband's name, in my husband's house. Let him sleep in peace to-night; he shall waken to-morrow, and I warn you that this unprovoked insult shall be the last you will ever offer me."

"I have accepted an ungracious office," sedately said Mrs. Osborne; "but I shall do my duty. I obey William's orders: I am perfectly willing to abide by his decision."

Tears rushed to the eyes of Adèle; her heart swelled, but pride would not let her insist or prolong the contest. She yielded, and left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MESSAGE.

ADÈLE went up to her room. Jeannette was there, preparing everything for the night. She turned round on hearing her mistress enter. The old servant paused in the act of pouring some water into a crystal decanter, and said, earnestly:

"Madame is very pale; is she not well?"

"My head aches," replied Adèle, sitting down. "Is that the book I was reading to-day? Yes—give it to me, Jeannette—thank you."

She opened the book; her eyes were fastened on the page, but her hand did not turn it.

"This lamp will not burn to-night," said Jeannette; "shall I light the other one, Madame?"

Adèle looked up; the flame of her little antique lamp was flickering feebly, and seemed ready to expire.

"Why should it not burn to-night?" she asked, moodily; "do you want to make an omen of it? to make me superstitious? Let it burn or not, what matter?"

"Then I shall light the other one," said Jeannette.

"I tell you it will burn well enough, if you give it oil and wick."

"It has both, and it is going out."

The flame was dying away; Adèle watched it until it vanished, then she rose, went to the lamp, and showing Jeannette a grain of sand that stopped the narrow opening through which the wick passed, she said, calmly:

"You see what it was: a grain of sand! and you would have had me believe that it was something."

She went back to her book; Jeannette looked at her with surprise.

"What ails her?" she thought; "what is going on in this house this whole day, that they all have such strange faces?"

"You need not do that, Jeannette," said Adèle, perceiving that Jeannette was drawing the window curtains close.

"Monsieur dislikes the light."

"You need not, I say; Monsieur Osborne is unwell, and sleeps below."

"And Madame stays with him."

"I stay here. He prefers being alone."

She had resumed her seat and taken her book; she pushed it away as she spoke, and she leaned her forehead on her hand. Jeannnette was mute with surprise, but she recovered so far as to say:

"I fear Madame's headache is very bad."

"Yes, very bad, indeed; open the window."

Jeannette obeyed.

"The stars are shining to-night," she said; "it is a beautiful night, mild and quiet."

Adèle rose and went, and looked out at the sky; it glittered with stars.

"Let them shine," she said; "they shone last night too, though we could not see them. You remember how troubled I was about it. Was it not foolish? For what hid them?—a cloud that melted away with the morning—no more. Shut the window, Jeannette, it is cold, quite cold."

She went back shivering to her place by the table.

"I am sure that book makes Madame's head ache worse," said Jeannette, "and as Madame does not seem to be sleepy, shall I tell her one of my old stories? I remember one, just such a one as Madame likes, about two faithful lovers, a husband and his wife, a story without betrayal or infidelity."

Adèle bit her lips and looked provoked.

"Jeannette, what ails you?" she asked; "why on earth do you talk so to me this evening? What is there so surprising in Monsieur Osborne's having a headache, or choosing a cooler room than this? I tell you I think nothing of it—nothing."

"And why should I think anything of it, Madame?" asked Jeannette, earnestly.

"Then say or hint nothing about it!" rejoined her mistress, sharply.

"Ah, there is surely something amiss," inwardly groaned Jeannette; "all is not right—I never will believe it."

She could not make up her mind to leave the room·

She settled one thing, then another, until nothing was left for her to do; she then turned round, and reluctantly supposed Madame did not want her any longer.

Adèle did not answer; she sat rigid as stone, pale as ashes, looking at a piece of paper which she had found in the book before her, and where, indeed, her own hand had unconsciously placed it the preceding day. It was the envelope of the anonymous letter, and within it were written in pencil, in a feigned hand, the following words, which no one save Adèle had read:—

"A friend of Monsieur Osborne's honour thinks it but right to forward to him the following letter, addressed by Monsieur de Launay to Monsieur Osborne's wife. Comments are superfluous."

"I am undone," said Adèle, with a groan, "I am undone!"

"Madame, Madame, what has happened?" cried Jeannnette, running up to her.

Adèle gave her a dreary look.

"I am undone," she said again; "that was why he seemed so strange; that was why they all taunted and insulted me; that is why he would not kiss me. —I am undone." She laid her head on the table, and moaned.

Jeannette was at her wit's end.

"But, Madame, what can have happened?" she exclaimed, distractedly; "what can there be in that bit of paper?"

Adèle raised her head, and threw her arms around the neck of Jeannette.

"Jeannette," she said, "you will outlive your little mistress. I must die, my heart must break—I tell you it must. I shall leave you another sad story to tell, Jeannette, the saddest you ever told. Oh, I did not think he ever could forsake me."

She broke into tearless sobs.

"Madame," cried Jeannette, almost angrily, "this is folly; you are dreaming. Monsieur is passionately fond of you; you are above all else."

Adèle looked up gloomily.

"He would not see me—he would not kiss me—my deadly foe guards his door. I am undone—I am undone! I could have forgiven him again and again had he been ever so guilty."

"But, Madame," urged Jeannette, "this is some mistake, some dreadful misunderstanding. When you see Monsieur, all will be made clear."

"All is over!" said Adèle, drearily; "his faith in me, my trust in him, are broken—all is over. He has not accused me, he has condemned me unheard. He has not asked me for explanation or justification, he has listened to my enemies, and passed sentence upon me. And he told me once that the whole world could not prevail against me. If an angel had said to me—'He will forsake you,' I would have scorned the heavenly warning."

"All is not over yet," cried Jeannette. "God is just; all is not over yet."

Adèle did not heed her.

"I am cold," she said, shivering; "help me to lie down."

Jeannette obeyed; she raised her mistress in her

arms, and softly placed her on the bed. Adèle turned her face to the wall, and closed her eyes.

"How does Madame feel?" asked Jeannette.

Adèle opened her eyes.

"I feel nothing," she apathetically replied, "nothing; the enemy has prevailed against me, and I am a vanquished woman. Do not think," she added, after a pause, "do not think that I accuse him. No, Jeannette, I dare say he could not help it, and be sure that he suffers more than I do. I have a consolation, moreover, denied to him; his image is stainless in my mind. And I—God help me!—and I—" she groaned, and covering her face with her hands, she said no more.

"Holy Virgin!" angrily cried Jeannette, "that any one should dare and think ill of you! Why, I would put my hand in the fire that you are as innocent as a baby!"

Adèle removed her hands from her face, and smiled sadly.

"Ah, but you are not my husband," she said; "you are not fond of me, exasperated at the mere idea that a man should dare to write love-letters to your wife. But I said I would not accuse him, and I never will. I once called him my king, and I will be a loyal subject to the last."

Jeannette wrung her hands.

"If Monsieur could think ill of you," she passionately began; but Adèle raised her hand, and said—

"Jeannette, you have often called me a Republican; but there is one of your old stories which I

ever loved dearly. When Jean de Courcelles was beheaded for high treason by sentence of the Parliament of Dijon, he turned to the people as he reached the scaffold, and before he laid his head on the block, he cried out—'*Vive le Roi!*' And you know, Jeannette, that his innocence was proved—that the same Parliament of Dijon that had condemned him, rehabilitated his memory, and restored his confiscated lands, and amongst them this very Manor of Courcelles, to his descendants. As he did, the last of those descendants will do. She, too, has her king, and she, too, is falsely condemned as traitor. But, Jeannette, he is none the less her king and her sovereign. She cannot prove her innocence, and she will not weary him with vain protestations or mean entreaties. She knows the time will come for her, as it came for Jean de Courcelles, when her sovereign will repent, when, though dead and gone perhaps, she will make him feel within his very heart that his little wife was true. And though that time should never come, even with her last breath, even with her head on the block, she will cry—*Vive le Roi!*"

Her voice died in passionate sobs and tears, with which those of Jeannette mingled. She seized the hand of her young mistress, and raising it to her lips, she cried, with indignant grief,—

"Madame, Madame, all is not over yet."

"No, all is not over yet," echoed Adèle; "he has given himself up to the enemy; his grief, his anguish, are but just begun."

"May I come in?" asked the soft voice of Mrs. Osborne at the door.

She entered, and with her Docteur Guillaume.

Mr. Osborne had slept a short, troubled sleep; he had wakened in a burning fever, haunted by one tormenting thought; "It is not true!" he ever repeated to himself, "it is not true!"

The door of his room suddenly, though noiselessly, opened, his step-mother appeared on the threshold, smelling a vinaigrette; without advancing, she said,—

"Adèle has been. I told her your head ached, and that you were sleeping. Have I done well?"

"You have, thank you."

"Here is Docteur Guillaume," she added, drawing back, and allowing Docteur Guillaume to enter alone.

"Well, and what is the matter now?" asked Docteur Guillaume, a little impatiently.

Mrs. Osborne had left the door ajar; she did no hear her step-son's reply, but she heard Docteur Guillaume's rejoinder:—

"I should not wonder if you were going to have the small pox."

Mr. Osborne moaned.

Docteur Guillaume hated milksops, at least so he said.

"Ah, bah!" he drily observed, sitting down, "it will be nothing. I have seven cases in Nantua, all thrivi g."

"Nothing! and Adèle, my wife! What will it be to her, poor child?"

Docteur Guillaume was an old bachelor. He had no sympathy with conjugal fondness.

"Ah, bah!" he said, ironically, "the most devoted of wives must bear with a husband's sickness; Madame Osborne is too reasonable not to bear with yours."

"You do not understand me," impatiently said Mr. Osborne; "she has never been vaccinated."

"True; I remember that her godmother considers vaccination a proof that the world is going away: she thinks, too, that it has injured the standard of the human race by sparing the puny and the weak. Mademoiselle de Janson should have been a Spartan under Lycurgus."

"Good God! it may be her death," groaned Mr. Osborne.

"She must leave the house," said Docteur Guillaume.

"Leave the house, whilst I am sick in it—she never will. God help me! Why did not I stay in Nantua?"

"We can use art," said Docteur Guillaume, smiling.

"Do not, you would but alarm her more—you could not deceive her."

"Very well," replied Docteur Guillaume, who never lost time in useless argument. He took a pen, wrote down a prescription, and with the intimation, "it will be nothing—I shall call to-morrow," he was going to leave the room, when Mr. Osborne detained him.

"Do me the favour of seeing her this evening,"

he said; "tell her as gently as you can what ails me; entreat her not to come near me, and, if you can, indeed, persuade her to leave the house," he added, sighing; "do so."

"I shall do my best," replied Docteur Guillaume, with his hand on the door; "in a week you will be up and well."

Mrs. Osborne sat waiting in the next room; Docteur Guillaume crossed it, with a bow, but she detained him, and said, anxiously,—

"Well?"

Docteur Guillaume knew little or nothing of Mrs. Osborne, but he disliked her without caring to know why. Her calm speech, her still blue eyes, her unchanging smile, annoyed and irritated him. With more brevity than politeness, he echoed,—

"Well, what about it. Keep him quiet."

"But what ails him, Docteur Guillaume?"

"He is a little feverish—no noise, no agitation."

"True; but what is it?"

"What is it! why it is, or it will be, the small-pox, of course."

Mrs. Osborne gave a start.

"Ah, bah! it will be nothing," said Docteur Guillaume.

"That dreadful disease!" she murmured.

"Pooh! pooh!"

"Anna is fortunately out of the house, and Isabella has had it twice, but the child—but his wife—they must not go near him."

"Go near him! They must leave the house."

Mrs. Osborne shook her head.

"Adèle never will," she said; "besides, it might seem unkind; her husband might think——"

"He wishes her to leave."

"I do not know how to keep her out of his room," pursued Mrs. Osborne.

"Lock the door."

"Ah, Docteur Guillaume, if you knew her devoted——"

"Where is that obstinate little lady?" he interrupted, "I must speak to her."

"She is in her room," replied Mrs. Osborne; "I shall go with you. But pray tell her as guardedly——"

"Of course," he again interrupted, with the impatience of a man who had no time to lose.

Mrs. Osborne delayed him no longer, and first taking the wise precaution of locking the door of Mr. Osborne's room, she accompanied Docteur Guillaume upstairs. She paused once on the staircase to observe,—

"Did my son ask for a nurse?"

"No, but I shall send one, of course."

"Do not; let no mercenary hand——"

"Is not this the door of Madame Osborne's room?" interrupted Docteur Guillaume, who hated sentiment of any sort.

Mrs. Osborne assented, opened the door, and gently saying,—

"May I come in?" entered as she said it.

"Do not alarm yourself," she began; "leave the room, Jeannette;—do not, I say, alarm yourself." She paused and looked at Jeannette, who had not stirred.

"Leave the room, Jeannette," said Adèle, sitting up in her bed.

Reluctantly Jeannette obeyed.

"We are come, Docteur Guillaume and I, to bring you news of William's headache," pursued Mrs. Osborne.

Adèle, who now saw Docteur Guillaume for the first time, turned ashy pale, and fixed on him a terrified look.

"What ails him?" she asked, scarcely able to speak.

"Nothing—nothing—" shortly replied Docteur Guillaume. "He sent for me at this hour, to prescribe for a headache. Absurd, eh?"

"There is no fear of brain fever?" suggested Mrs. Osborne.

Docteur Guillaume gave her a wrathful look.

"Brain fever—nothing like it."

"Or typhus?" she continued.

"Typhus!" indignantly echoed Docteur Guillaume; "there is not one case of typhus in the whole department. He has nothing," he pursued; "but he fancies he is going to have the small-pox." Adèle started. "I should not have disturbed you at this hour," phlegmatically continued Docteur Guillaume, "had he not requested me to do so."

"He asked you to come?" she said.

"Yes, he wished you to know why you could not see him for a few days."

"I am not to see him?"

"By no means: I forbid it, and Mr. Osborne begs you will not think of it."

"Docteur Guillaume, can you give me your word that he is not seriously ill?" asked Adèle, very earnestly.

"By all means. I repeat it—nothing, or almost nothing, ails him."

"And I am not to see him?" she said, smiling strangely.

"Might not Adèle see him at the door of his room?" suggested Mrs. Osborne.

"Certainly not. Her husband would be much displeased, and very justly."

Adèle smiled again.

"He does not wish to see me," she said.

"By no means; and if you will have the good sense to leave the house at once, and not return—"

"Excuse me," gravely interrupted Mrs. Osborne, "William cannot expect his wife to leave the house at such a moment."

"Ah! bah!" replied the Doctor, irritated at being so strangely opposed, "he will be delighted."

"Delighted, Docteur Guillaume—you mistake."

"Pray, Madame, were you present? I say, and I repeat, that Madame Osborne cannot gratify her husband more than by leaving the house."

The lip of Adèle quivered slightly, but she replied calmly—

"I shall give him that gratification, Docteur Guillaume, but not to-night."

"To-morrow morning, then?"

"Not to-night," said Adèle again.

"True, it is late," replied Docteur Guillaume; and seeing her so calm, almost cold, he wondered under

what illusions concerning his wife's passionate fondness Mr. Osborne laboured; but it was no business of his. He rose, congratulated her with a touch of irony on her good sense, and bidding her good night, he left the room.

"Good-night," apathetically replied Adèle.

Scarcely had the door closed upon them, when it opened again, and Mrs. Osborne appeared, mild and dignified, on the threshold.

"Adèle," she said, "do me the justice to believe that with this I had nothing to do."

Adèle did not look at her. She shook her head, like one whom speech wearied, and let it sink back languidly on her pillow.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DANGEROUS FRIEND.

On their way down, Mrs. Osborne and Docteur Guillaume were stopped by Marie, Lilian's bonne.

Mademoiselle Lilian had a headache, and felt sick, she said.

Mrs. Osborne gave Docteur Guillaume a significant glance; without a word, they went at once to the child's room. Lilian lay moaning in her little white bed. Docteur Guillaume gave her a brief look, and said emphatically—

"The small-pox."

Mrs. Osborne moaned.

"What about it?" sharply asked Docteur Guillaume; "you have had the small-pox, have you not?"

"I believe I have."

"And you are alive and well. I say it will be nothing."

Docteur Guillaume was in his most abrupt mood, and again repeating that Mr. Osborne and his daughter would do well enough if they were kept quiet, he left.

Mrs. Osborne had parted from him. She had re-entered her stepson's study; she had resumed her place in his chair. She was leaning back—her chin in her hand,—her whole aspect bespeaking thought, earnest and absorbing, when she suddenly beheld Isabella standing before her, with pale, angry mien.

"What brought you here?" coldly asked Mrs. Osborne, rising.

"I want William."

"He is asleep, and ill. You cannot see him. What do you want with him?"

"I want to tell him that Joseph is a traitor, who has deceived him to screen his wife. I want to tell him that his wife is a vile deceiver, and Monsieur de Launay a dishonourable liar. I want to see him, because I have been wronged, and that I will be revenged."

She spoke in a low, slow, deliberate voice, but pregnant with passion and resentment. Mrs. Osborne looked at her daughter; she saw well enough that Isabella was in one of those moods when she was not subject to her own control—when urged beyond her limited powers of self-restraint, she broke through every barrier.

"My dear girl," she said, "you grieve me; you are not reasonable. Monsieur de Launay was free to write to Mademoiselle de Courcelles. Mademoiselle de Courcelles was free to write to him. They were even free to love. He was not bound to you; she was not bound to William. In short, this is a matter to be regretted. It is not a crime which either you or William can resent."

She spoke in her smoothest tones.

Isabella laughed with bitter scorn.

"What!" she cried, "he was free to write to her whilst he was writing to me? What! she was free to have written to one man, had assignations with him, and two months later to become the wife of another man, and never tell him?—such and such has been the case—have me after that if you like."

"My dear, you exaggerate—I dare say you are mistaken—that Monsieur de Launay never could act so cruelly to you—that she could never be so shameless."

"You will make me mad!" cried Isabella, clasping her hands with strange passion; "did I not tell you that Joseph was a traitor? Did I not tell him so to his face this evening?"

"Isabella," said Mrs. Osborne, coldly, "your feelings carry you beyond justice. You make yourself the accuser of your family. I cannot allow my son Joseph to be thus unjustly condemned."

Isabella gave her mother a strange look, but did not answer.

"Capitaine Joseph," resumed Mrs. Osborne, "is incapable of treason under any shape; he would no more deceive William to favour William's wife, than he would desert his flag in the hour of peril."

Isabella folded her arms, and laughed.

"Go to his room," she said, "go to his room, and look in the uppermost drawer of his table; look in the corner, and see what letters you will find there."

"It is not my habit to pry into the secrets of my children," said Mrs. Osborne, in a low, dignified

tone. "Joseph is a man, long beyond my control; he may write and receive such letters as he pleases."

"He write and receive letters!" impatiently exclaimed Isabella; "and do you suppose I would have troubled myself about his letters? They are *her* letters, I tell you—the love-letters of Adèle to Monsieur de Launay, and fond letters they are, letters which Monsieur de Launay, I have no doubt, has preserved with tender care, until Capitaine Joseph, like a kind brother-in-law, got them back for her. Well, well! it is not over yet; they thought to dupe me, but it is not over yet."

Mrs. Osborne sat down—she had been standing the whole time—and raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You shock me!" she said, withdrawing it; "you shock me! I could not have believed this of Joseph; I could not have believed it of her—so young, so childish, so early perverted; it is dreadful."

"But it is not over yet," said Isabella—"oh, no, it is not over yet. If William will not do me justice, I will aright myself. What! shall these two have laughed at me—as I know they have—shall they have acted a mean, treacherous part, and made me both their dupe and their victim? Shall Isabella Osborne have been good enough to console Auguste de Launay for the loss of Mr. Osborne's wife? Shall she have been secretely scorned to her by him, and shall she not have revenge? What! she dares to call him the one beloved of her heart?—she dares to write it, and then to marry my brother, and brave

me with the sight of his infatuated love ?—let her—let her !"

She spoke in a voice tremulous with passion. Mrs. Osborne sighed deeply.

" Isabella," she said, " the past is beyond recall. Let William believe in the exclusive love of his wife ; we must not disturb his peace of mind with unavailing revelations. Let her enjoy her husband's affection ; that she should lose it would do you no good ; it would not make it less cruel to remember how cruelly you have been deceived and trifled with. Endurance is the lot of all."

" It shall not be my lot," said Isabella, springing to the door of her brother's room ; but before her hand had touched it, that door had opened, and Mr. Osborne stood on the threshold facing his sister. He had not heard all, but he had heard enough to call him up from his sick bed.

" Isabella, what have you been saying ?" he asked, sternly.

" The truth," she boldly replied. " The letters of Adèle to Monsieur de Launay are in Joseph's drawer."

" Where are they ?" he exclaimed, with passionate resentment ; " give them to me this moment."

" Ask them from Joseph yourself," said Isabella, turning away proudly.

Mr. Osborne looked at his stepmother.

" Madame," he said, " ask these letters from your son in my name."

" I shall," replied Mrs. Osborne. " For Heaven's sake, William, leave us. Isabella, obey me ; leave

the room this moment." She stepped between them. "You shall have those letters, I promise that you shall," she added, addressing Mr. Osborne.

"See that you keep your word," he replied, with something like menace in his tone. He re-entered his room, and closed the door on himself.

"Isabella, what have you done?" cried Mrs. Osborne. "Heaven help us! strife, family strife, division, hatred, animosity, surround me—me the most pacific of women. You have put me in such a position that I must, whether I like it or not, act against that unfortunate girl. Leave the room. I am displeased with you, Isabella, deeply displeased."

"See that you keep your word to him," said Isabella; and without deigning to say more, she left the apartment.

Mrs. Osborne withdrew her handkerchief from her eyes and rang the bell; Jean answered it.

"Where is Capitaine Joseph?" she asked.

Jean answered that Capitaine Joseph was smoking in his room.

"Ask him to go and wait for me in the drawing-room, and when he is there, come and tell me."

Jean withdrew; in a quarter of an hour he returned with the intimation that Monsieur le Capitaine was waiting in the drawing-room for Madame.

Mrs. Osborne did not look up from the book she was reading; she merely said, "Very well," and turned a page; Jean closed the door; Mrs. Osborne leisurely put her book aside, rose, took a small flat candlestick from the table and lit it, gave a careful

look around her, and finally left the room, and closed and locked the door.

With calm and silent step she crossed the corridors, she passed through the rooms, she went up and down the staircase that had until then known only the light and joyous foot of Adèle running to seek her husband. She reached the main staircase, she noiselessly passed the drawing-room door, she never paused until she reached the room of Capitaine Joseph. The evil star of Adèle was in the ascendant, the door was not locked. Mrs. Osborne entered and gave a rapid look around; there was but one table, and it had but two drawers. At once she went to it; she opened the uppermost, she seized on a small packet of letters, she looked at the writing. Yes, this was what she wanted. She went to the door, drew the bolt, then leisurely took a chair, and holding up her little flat candlestick —her sight was not very good—she began reading.

Capitaine Joseph waited in the drawing-room until his patience was exhausted, until he swore between his teeth, with an oath which we need not repeat, that he would wait no longer. He went back to his apartment, resolved that neither requests nor messages should withdraw him from it, but to his amazement the door which he had left open resisted all his efforts. Capitaine Joseph felt in a bad temper, and he had withdrawn his right leg to bestow on the culprit a vigorous kick, when his intentions were anticipated, the door was unlocked from within, and Mrs. Osborne appeared, and very calmly said—

"Come in, Joseph."

Joseph did not go in, he bounced in, red as a

turkey-cock. He gave the open and empty table-drawer a rapid look, and trembling with passion, he cried—

"Madame, Madame, what have you been doing here?"

"My duty," she solemnly replied.

Capitaine Joseph cooled down at once. He placed a chair by the door, and riding it according to his favourite fashion, he said phlegmatically—

"I must trouble you for those letters."

"Joseph, you are a fool!" said his mother, with calm scorn. "If I did not wish to see you, to speak to you,—if I were not quite ready to account for my conduct, you would not find me here waiting for you."

"Humph!" he sceptically observed. "I was waiting below."

"What tempted that unhappy girl to repose trust in you?" pursued his mother; "a friend like you is worse than an enemy. Why did you keep those letters and not give them to her at once, or burn them? Why did you leave them here in your table-drawer for Isabella to see them and rush off with the intelligence to William, who, let him disguise it as he may, is exasperated with secret jealousy? Joseph, Joseph, you have been the worst enemy Adéle ever had."

Capitaine Joseph bit his moustache and looked as he felt, very much piqued. He had been pluming himself the whole evening on the address with which he had obtained these letters from Monsieur de Launay; he had quietly enjoyed, by anticipation,

the start, the mixture of fright, surprise, and joy, with which Adèle would find them on her table that night; he had, with the mind's vision, seen her beautiful eyes swim with grateful tears; he was not even without some expectation of finding, on arriving in Paris, a little note tender though short, beginning with "Best of friends," and expressing in guarded language the feelings of a young and ardent heart;—and this was the end.

"She holds me her foe, and I am her best friend," continued Mrs. Osborne; "I sacrifice myself to save her. I had promised William that he should have those letters."

"Madame," cried Capitaine Joseph.

"And he shall never see them," she resumed; "I have burned them."

She pointed, as she spoke, to a heap of black ashes on the floor.

Capitaine Joseph shook his head sceptically.

"Perhaps you committed a mistake," he suggested; "burned something else instead."

"You are insolent," said Mrs. Osborne, reddening; "but chance gives me the power of convincing you. They are but half burned; the fragments that remain are still sufficient to convince William, too, if you choose to show them to him."

"We shall see that," coolly replied Capitaine Joseph.

He picked up the half-burned letters from the floor; he looked at them attentively; they certainly were the same he had received from Monsieur de Launay. He recognized the writing, the paper, and

a few words which he had read here and there left him no doubt of their identity. Without comment, he took a match, lit it, and finished the work of destruction which Mrs. Osborne had begun.

"Had you done that sooner," she said, severely, "you would have spared much evil that is now beyond remedy."

She went to the door. On the threshold she paused, and observed—

"I do not advise you to go near William—he has the small-pox."

"The small-pox!" cried Capitaine Joseph, horrified, "Ah! bah!"

"The small-pox," she repeated, and she left the room.

She had said enough. Capitaine Joseph forgot Adèle—her letters—her fate. Mr. Osborne had the small-pox, and Capitaine Joseph could not pack up too quickly, and leave the house too soon. Dawn, however, glimmered in the sky before he could procure one of the three carriages which, out of excess of caution, he had sent for in various directions. At length one was found; it stood waiting at the gate of the Manor. Eagerly was Capitaine Joseph going to leap into it, when a fair, but firm hand kept him back.

"Where are you going?" asked the irate voice of Isabella behind him.

"To Paris—and I advise you to accompany me."

"Where are the letters?"

"What letters?"

"Her letters;—where are they?"

"Burned.—Are you coming?"

"Burned! You burned them!"

"Will you come or will you not?"

"Joseph, you will repent it yet."

"Let Madame Osborne repent it if she likes—it was her doing. You will repent staying here. I will wait—yes, I will wait five minutes for you."

To this magnanimous offer Isabella returned no reply. She was gone.

"Tant pis pour elle," grumbled Capitaine Joseph, as he entered the carriage, which rapidly drove away. "I made a fair offer. The small-pox—I always had a bad opinion of that man."

CHAPTER XV.

A DEPARTURE.

"They are all conspiring against me," thought Isabella, trembling with passion. "She promised him those letters, and she burns them! — burns them to screen her and condemn me! True. Of what use can the slighted, despised, jilted daughter be? The loved wife is all-powerful; to her due court must be paid."

She entered her room, from which the sounds of Capitaine Joseph's departure had drawn her; she closed the door with a passionate violence, that made it ring again; she threw herself in an arm-chair like a whirlwind; and with an amazed start she beheld Adèle, who stood before her, cold and pale.

An angry "What do you want?" rose to Isabella's lips, but had not time to pass them. Adèle anticipated the question by declaring her purpose.

"I came here to speak to you," she said; "you were absent, and I waited for your return; and now I tell you, Isabella, that I will not leave this room without knowing the truth from you."

"And pray why should I tell it to you?"

"You are my enemy, my deadly enemy," replied Adèle, raising her slight hand, "you hate me; *you* will tell me the truth, if no one else will."

Isabella folded her arms sulkily, and did not reply.

"Isabella," pursued her sister-in-law, "you know what is going on in this house; you told me yesterday morning that I might learn it yet. You spoke the truth—but I have learned it in riddles. Something dreadful hangs over us all; but what it is no one will tell me. I meet averted glances, I hear broken words, and I feel," she added, pressing her hand to her head, "that unless I know more, it will make me mad. What was there in that letter?" she resumed, with sudden impetuosity, "what was there in it? You know—she knows—everyone knows—and not I! What was it, I say?"

Miss Osborne did not answer; she rose to leave the room; but Adèle was at the door before she could reach it; she laid her back to it, she stretched her arms across it, and she faced her sister-in-law with an aspect so deadly pale, with such despair and wildness in it, that Isabella stepped back half frightened.

"You shall not leave this room," said Adèle, "until I know that woful secret. You are my accuser; you have robbed me of all I had—my husband's love and esteem; you can but break my heart. Speak, I tell you, speak!"

Strong passion is a spell that rules the most rebellious spirits, and Isabella felt compelled to answer this passionate adjuration.

"I have nothing to tell you," she said; "since you know about Monsieur de Launay's letter, you know as much as I do; for, of course," she added, smiling bitterly, "you have seen it; your friend Joseph shewed it to you."

"He did not. Oh, tell me all—do not spare me."

"And what is there to tell you?" moodily replied Isabella. "Some one sent the letter to William, who insulted me because he thought it was meant for me, whereas it concerned his wife."

"No, no—he does not—he cannot believe that," cried Adèle, passionately; "he does not believe it."

"He does not believe it!" said Isabella, whose temper was rising; "are you mad? Not believe it, when Monsieur de Launay confesses all!"

"My word shall prevail over his," said Adèle, clasping her hands. "He may slander me, my husband will be my defender."

Isabella laughed with thorough scorn.

"And your letters—those letters which Monsieur de Launay gave to your friend Joseph, which not two hours ago, and in my presence, William made mamma promise to bring to him—do you think he believes it after that?"

"Letters! what letters?"

"What letters! your letters."

"My letters! where are they?"

"She burned them."

"Burned! they are burned?"

"So Joseph told me before going."

"He is gone; are you sure he is gone?"

"Am I sure I am here?"

"And they are burned—really burned?"

"Really burned."

Adèle wrung her hands.

"Ay, truly you have kind friends. Your husband knows from me that they existed, but his eye shall never behold them."

"Isabella," said Adèle, "you are dreaming, or you have been deceived. I never wrote love letters to any one, and he knows it. He would laugh at any one that would tell him so."

"The girl is crazy," said Isabella, with something like compassion. "Laugh! I promise you he did not laugh, when he ordered, more than he asked, mamma to bring them to him."

"You saw him—you saw him yourself. You spoke to him—you heard him."

"Of course I did."

"But when—when?"

"Not two hours ago, I tell you."

"And he will not see me," said Adèle, with an accent full of woe; "he will not see me."

She said no more, but opened the door and left the room of Isabella. She went back to her own room; Jeannette was there waiting, with troubled aspect, for her mistress. Jeannette had a firm mind, but she was old, and that wild night, as she called it, was too much for her. She was distracted between her fear for the health of her mistress, and her dismay at the woe into which she saw her so suddenly fallen. "How shall I keep her from Mademoiselle Lilian," she thought, "when she knows she is ill? how shall I prevent her from breaking her

heart about Monsieur. If she could only see him! But good heavens! am I mad! she must not see him! It is enough to make one mad, it is. And they are all in a league against her, poor lamb, all against her."

Her thoughts had reached this point when Adèle stood by her side.

"It is drawing to a close," she said. "Yes, Jeannette; it will soon be all over. He has sent me word to leave this house, and I have promised to give him that gratification."

"Oh, Madame, it is out of affection, out of love," interrupted Jeannette, "Monsieur is ill, and——"

"And do you believe that?" in her turn interrupted Adèle. "Ay, he is very ill, but his illness is wrath. His stepmother, his sister can see him, but not his wife. He has tried, through Docteur Guillaume, to make me believe that he is ill; but I know better."

"Oh, Madame—Mademoiselle Lilian——" began Jeannette; but she stopped short, and Adèle, who had not heard her, went on :—

"Jeannette, his illness is, that his love is turned into hate—that his wife is his wife no more."

"Ah, Madame, Madame, do not say such dreadful things, do not look so wild."

"Do I look wild?" asked Adèle, looking at her pale image in the glass, "or have you too joined my enemies? He used to think that I looked handsome. Well, I am losing time; give me the key."

"What key, Madame?"

Adèle fixed on her a piercing look.

"You know well enough what key I mean," she replied; "the key which you have hidden so well that I could not find it. The key of the room next to that where he is sleeping. I must see him before I go; oh, yes, I must see him."

"I have not got it," said Jeannette.

"You have it, Jeannette; give it to me."

"I have not got it," said Jeannette again.

"Jeannette, I shall never forgive you."

"I have not got it," persisted the old woman.

"I shall never forgive you," cried Adèle, "and do you know what it is to be unforgiven?"

Jeannette groaned and wrung her hands.

"I tell you it would drag down the blessed from heaven, if anything unforgiven could enter there."

"I have not got it," said Jeannette, with apathetic monotony.

It was useless to insist. Jeannette was fixed in her denial; arguments, threats, entreaties, would have no power over her.

"Be it so," cried Adèle. "I tell you I shall see him."

She left the room; she ran down stairs, her brain was on fire, her thoughts met in one point and could not move from that. Seeing nothing, feeling nothing, she went straight to her husband's study. The door was locked within; she knocked, it opened, and Mrs. Osborne appeared on the threshold.

"I want to see my husband," said Adèle; "I shall leave the house. Oh, yes, you may be sure I shall; but I must see my husband before I go."

"You cannot," replied Mrs. Osborne. "I have

passed my word that you should not enter his room, and you shall not whilst I guard his door."

Fate never spoke more sternly.

"You have had two husbands," said Adèle, bitterly; "did you love neither? Do you know what you are doing? But what do I ask—are you not doing it all? Yet I will forgive you everything, even to the letter you sent and the letters you burned, if you will but let me see him one moment."

As well pray to a stone. The face of Mrs. Osborne remained inexorable and cold. Adèle sunk on her knees before her, and seized her hand.

"Let me see him," she said, "before it is too late, and he himself will bless you again and again for having disobeyed him."

"You pain me," said Mrs. Osborne, leaving the door and entering the study; "you pain me."

Adèle did not heed her. She sprang in through the door which Mrs. Osborne had left open, to the door of her husband's room. She shook it wildly, but it resisted all her efforts.

"William," she cried, "William, let me in, let me in."

No voice answered her. She called again and again with pathetic entreaty.

"Let me in. Speak to me—one word—but one."

And all was silent as death.

"You see," said Mrs. Osborne, who stood looking on, "you see yourself that he does not wish to see you—that I am innocent of it all. He is angry and irritated now, but with time, who knows—who can tell?"

Adèle did not heed her. She stood leaning against the door of her husband's room like one stricken; her arms fell lifeless by her sides, her head sank on her bosom, tears rushed from her eyes and flowed down her pale cheeks.

"All is over," she said, looking up and speaking in a low, dreary voice, "all is over. The world is ended, the husband forsakes the wife he has wedded —all is over."

She turned away, and slowly left the room. Mrs. Osborne followed her to lock the door, but was prevented by the sudden entrance of Isabella.

"What do you want here?" severely asked her mother; "is it not enough that William and Lilian have the small-pox—do you want to get it too, perverse girl?"

Isabella drew back three steps.

"The small-pox!" she said; "he has the small-pox?"

"Do you mean to say you did not know it?" calmly asked her mother.

Isabella's blue eyes kindled with wrath.

"You knew it, and let me stay here talking an hour to you and him," she cried; "no, there never was any thing like it—never."

"If I were you I should leave the house at once," coolly said Mrs. Osborne; "there are two carriages below, take one and go off to Anna. For my part, I fear nothing; I remain."

It exasperated Isabella to have to follow this advice, not to be able to stay and have a quarrel with her mamma; but fear proved stronger than temper.

"I know you hate me," she said, bursting into tears; "I know you do." She left the room, however.

"What a fool that girl is!" thought Mrs. Osborne; "she has had it twice, and she is actually afraid of it still. Patience truly, patience."

Miss Osborne fled on the wings of terror to look for Jean. She was audacious, but not brave. She felt as if she never could be too soon out of the house.

"A carriage!" she imperatively cried; "send for a carriage at once!"

"There are two below, this hour," groaned Jean; "Monsieur le Capitaine sent for three, and the two that came last will not go without being paid, and Madame, to whom I have been twice, will not pay either. Mademoiselle can have whichever she pleases."

Isabella ran up to her room to pack up, or rather tumble, a few things into a trunk, then she sat down upon it, and vowed she would not go.

"It is all a trick," she murmured moodily, "all a trick to get me out of the way. He was pale as death when I saw him—he had not a pimple on his face. I do not believe it."

She rose and emptied the trunk of its contents; then, crying with vexation at her own cowardice, she put them back. What if the small-pox that showed itself least externally were by some fatal chance the most contagious?

"I must go," she thought, "I will go; but woe to them all if they are cheating me."

With this prophetic denunciation she decided on departure.

Jean was wondering which carriage she would have, and by what magic he could allay the wrath of the rejected coachman, when his little mistress appeared before him, and said in a low voice—

"Jean, send for a carriage for me, if you please."

"There are two at the door," replied Jean, very much surprised at the sudden demand in which carriages were; "and Madame can have whichever she pleases."

"Either will do," she answered, and leaving him in silent wonder and perplexity, Adèle ascended the staircase and returned to her room. She entered it silently; without looking at Jeannette, she said—

"Give me my brown frock."

"Does Madame mean her violet taffetas?" hesitatingly suggested Jeannette.

"Give me my brown frock," said Adèle again; "the brown frock I took off the night before I was married."

"Madame! Madame!" gasped Jeannette, greatly alarmed, for Adèle was undressing; she was taking off the silk skirt and white body she had kept since the preceding evening, she was taking off the chain from around her neck, the earrings from her ears, the rings from her fingers.

"Give me my brown frock," said Adèle again; "tell him I kept nothing but my wedding ring; that is mine; it is the price of youth and liberty given in vain; the rest is his. Poor as I came to him, I shall leave him."

"I shall go mad!" groaned Jeannette, yet she obeyed, and helped her mistress to dress. "I shall go mad!" she cried, raising her clasped hands above her head. "Madame! Madame! take off that old thing and put on your silk dress. Monsieur wishes you to leave, because to stay might be your death; but you are his wife, and he loves you dearly."

Adèle laughed a low, dreary laugh.

"I called to him for one word—but one; in silence he scorned me. You will say he was asleep—asleep! *his* lightest whisper would at any time have wakened me from the deepest slumbers. No, no, it is all over. Tell him I forgave him—yes, you may tell him that."

"Madame, do not go—stay. I think I am getting really mad—no, I mean go by all means, but have patience. Believe all this is some sad mistake. Is it possible you do not understand that it must be made all clear, that lies cannot last?"

"Oh, yes, I know that," replied Adèle, calmly; "yes, I know he will learn and rue his sad error. I know his love will return to me as the stream to its channel; but where will be the use? I shall be dead then."

"People do not die so easily, Madame."

"The heart dies when the body lives. I feel mine growing very cold; but let that rest. This is the key of my jewel-box; keep it carefully, and give it to him; there are many valuable things in it; he was fond of making me presents when he liked me. They will do for Lilian."

"And where is Madame going?" asked Jeannette, faintly.

"I shall go to Alice."

Jeannette rocked herself to and fro; "I shall never get over this," she thought, "never. If I try to keep her, it may be her death. If I let her go, it will break her heart."

She felt distracted, yet a sort of vague hope, of confused plan, offered itself to her mind. Could she not, when Adèle was gone, see Mr. Osborne, and do something?—tell him, for instance, not to let them kill his wife? Mr. Osborne was not, indeed, a man to meddle with, but desperate evils need desperate remedies.

"Good-bye, Jeannette," said Adèle, "good-bye! The sun is rising; it is time to go."

"Ah, Madame, it is very early."

"It was earlier on my wedding morning."

"Ah, Madame, in that old brown frock! Ah, Madame!"

Adèle clasped her hands, and burst into tears.

"Would I were again the little girl who wore it!" she cried; "*she* had a faithful friend, a true friend, and I have none—none—yes, Jeannette, tell him that when you see him; say his wife went away poor, solitary as on that morning;—but no, say nothing; his heart will be sore enough without it. Good-bye, I say, good-bye! Never again shall I enter this house—never—never!"

She left the room; she passed by Lilian's door, and shook her head.

"She is not mine," she said, with a swelling heart. "I shall not waken her this morning, as I did that day when I kissed her, and cried so sorely."

Jeannette groaned, but said nothing. Adèle spoke no more until she reached the door of the Manor. They had met no one; Jeannette alone had followed her mistress down stairs, and now stood with her on the threshold of the house. The sun had not long risen, a red and burning shield in a chill sky; the road was wet with the night dew; the grass glittered; the trees looked heavy and cold; mists moved on the lake.

Miss Osborne was gone, and the remaining carriage stood waiting; but Adèle lingered on the threshold like one unable to move; her head was sunk, her hands were clasped. What bitter and woful thoughts were with her then? Jeannette saw and watched a strange storm pass over her pale face; she saw her bosom heave, her hands wrung convulsively.

"Madame, Madame!" she said, imploringly.

Adèle turned on her sharply.

"You shall find out nothing," she said, "nothing."

And leaving Jeannette amazed, she entered the carriage, which drove away.

CHAPTER XVI.

VICTORY.

Mrs. Osborne watched it until it vanished; she stood on the balcony of the central drawing-room window. Openly she exulted over the defeated foe. Her blue eye had unusual light; a bright spot burned on her cheek; her lip smiled with calm triumph. She had prevailed; Fortune had aided her; nothing had opposed—everything had favoured her; it was over: the self-banished wife had left her mistress of the battle field.

For once the insolence of victory conquered the calmness of this self-possessed lady. She rang; Mathieu appeared. Mathieu was Mr. Osborne's servant, of course; but Mrs. Osborne had placed him in the house. He had been powerful during her reign; since Mr. Osborne's marriage Mathieu had fallen in the background. His master did not like him; but, too careless to take the trouble of dismissing him, he was satisfied with making little or no use of him. Mathieu felt he was no favourite; he became sulky. Mr. Osborne at length

made up his mind, and gave him warning to leave. Mrs. Osborne now gave him one look—he was a heavy, sullen man, with a low, stubborn forehead—and she felt that Mathieu would do.

"Lock and bolt the front door," she said, "and let no one enter the house without my knowledge."

"Not a soul shall come in," sulkily replied Mathieu.

"When the door is locked, come back here to me."

"She is gone," thought Mrs. Osborne, "gone, foolish girl! To fly is to abdicate. Never shall she enter this house again—never—never! I know him; all is over for her in his heart. She has deceived him. The love-letters are nothing; but the deceit, the falsehood doom her. Wider and wider shall the breach become—all is over."

She walked up and down the room. It was a majestic old apartment, not splendid, but solemn and grave. With silent complacency Mrs. Osborne surveyed tho capital of her new empire. Sweet is conquest to all—sweeter was it to her, from having been so long delayed, so hard to win.

"The door is locked and bolted," said Mathieu, reappearing.

"Lock the garden gate."

"Jean has the key."

"Send Jean to me."

In a few minutes, Jean, pale and disturbed—he had not the spirit of Jeannette—stood in the presence of his new mistress.

"Give me the key of the garden gate," she said, severely.

Jean drew the key from his pocket, and laid it on the table.

"Where is the key of the door that leads to the counting-house?"

"Monsieur has that key."

"Very well. My step-son has bought some plate lately; bring me the account of the new and the old. How much wine is there in the cellar?"

"There are two pipes of Burgundy which Monsieur——"

"Bring me the keys," she interrupted—"Stay, I shall go with you. Come, Mathieu, I want you too."

"The world is turned topsy-turvy," thought Jean. Mathieu, we need scarcely say, thought the world was getting round to the right point.

With firm step and steady eye Mrs. Osborne preceded the two servants to the cold, silent room where the plate was kept in an iron safe. With inexorable accuracy she detected that a small silver spoon had been lost; with attentive look she scanned her step-son's new purchases, and finally she took possession, not merely of the cellar keys for which she had asked, but of every key she could get hold of. Followed by Mathieu and Jean, she went over the whole house; within half-an-hour every door was locked, every bolt was drawn, every key was in the care of Mathieu. The apartment Mrs. Osborne visited last was that adjoining Mr. Osborne's room. She looked at the door; it was fast, the key was withdrawn. She looked at Jean.

"Monsieur has that key," he said.

She went to the window; there was but one; twenty feet divided it from the garden; but there were no shutters. Mrs. Osborne frowned.

"A thief could get in with a ladder and rob the whole house," she said; "let the carpenter come at once, Mathieu."

"He shall," said Mathieu, solemnly.

There was no more to do; they left the room; Mrs. Osborne locked it herself, and merely saying to Jean,—

"You need not answer the bell when I ring;" she bade Mathieu follow her to her room.

"And what has passed between them there no one can tell, Mademoiselle Jeannette," solemnly said Jean, as he related the whole to her: "all I can say is this; since the fall of Bonaparte and the battle of Waterloo, there has been nothing like it."

"Oh, the serpent!" cried Jeannette, "oh, the serpent!"

The key she had kept back from Adèle, for the sake of which she had remained behind, was useless; every avenue to Mr. Osborne's room was stopped, and, though he might not know it, the master of Courcelles was a prisoner in his own house.

"I must speak to Docteur Guillaume," thought Jeannette. "God knows what I shall say to him, but something I must say." She resolved to watch for his coming in a little room adjoining that of Lilian, and which overlooked the road; "and though I should stay here the whole day," thought Jean-

nette, "I shall not leave the window." Vain resolve! She had not been there an hour, when again Jean burst in upon her with wild looks.

"Mademoiselle Jeannette," he cried, "do you believe that people can be possessed with devils! because," he added, without waiting for a reply, "I am sure there is a devil in that fair, handsome Madame Osborne."

"Ay, and one of the worst; you tell me no news, Monsieur Jean."

"But have you seen the room of Mademoiselle Adèle—of Monsieur's wife? Have you seen what she and Mathieu have made of it?" asked Jean; "go and look, go and look."

Jeannette forgot that she was to stay by the window. She started up and ran to the room of her young mistress. The Emperor of China, looking for Aladdin's palace, and seeing but the bare spot on which it had once risen, gorgeous and splendid, did not remain more amazed, more bewildered than Jeannette on entering that room. All that love had once brought there, hate had cast forth. The bed on which she had slept was gone; the couch where she had rested, the mirror that had reflected back her image, every object she had touched, every elegant trifle he had given her, and she had enjoyed, had vanished; ruthlessly desecrated was this bower of love into a bare stone room, where the garish day entered freely, where the sun shone on cold walls and a dust-stained floor. What could her motive have been?—Was she so sure of prevailing?—Was she guided by a subtle policy that bade her efface

every token of the once-loved presence? Was she mad with success?

The arms of Jeannette fell powerless by her sides, she stared at Jean, who stared at her; at length the old woman spoke,—

"Monsieur Jean," she said, "that woman is mad with wickedness—mad—mad."

And whilst Jeannette was dooming Mrs. Osborne the opportunity fled.

After a long and heavy slumber, Mr. Osborne awoke, and saw his step-mother, who stood mild and grave, at the foot of his bed.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

He did not reply.

"Much worse," he said at length.

"There must have been something in that draught Docteur Guillaume sent to make you sleep," she resumed. "You never wakened once, and when Adèle bade you good bye at the door, you did not answer."

He gave a start.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Oh, she is gone this hour: she behaved very sensibly."

"Gone!" he said; "she is gone?"

"Was it not your wish?"

He did not answer. A strange expression of pain passed across his face. He had ardently wished her to go, but he had not thought that she could or would desert the house where he lay ill and suffering.

"And where did she go?" he asked at length.

"To Madame Lascours. It was high time for her to leave. Poor Lilian has been taken ill, too. Do not alarm yourself; Docteur Guillaume says it will be nothing. I shall see that she receives every care."

He turned his head on his pillow; the sick father, the sick child, were both forsaken. Suddenly a frown gathered on his brow; he sat up, he leaned on his elbow, he fixed a stern eye on his stepmother.

"And the letters," he said, "where are they?"

"Burned," she replied, calmly. "Joseph burned them. You cannot blame him."

"And how dare he burn them?" cried Mr. Osborne, trembling with fever and wrath; "where is he?"

"He left early this morning for Paris; his leave of absence was out."

Mr. Osborne sank bank exhausted on his pillow. The proof, the certainty he had thought to grasp, had left him once more a prey to tormenting doubt. Suddenly he rallied.

"She left some message for me; she wrote some letter. What!—where are they?" He fixed a keen look on Mrs. Osborne. She bore it without shrinking.

"She left no message—no letter," she replied.

He closed his eyes and sighed.

Mrs. Osborne looked at him for a while, then she said, gently—

"William, can you attend to me?"

He raised his heavy lids, and said: "Speak."

"You are not, thank God for it, in danger; but do you not think, William, it would be right to yourself, to your wife, to your family, to make your will?"

"My will!" he said, with a bitter smile, "I wonder it was not mentioned earlier."

Mrs. Osborne looked injured.

"You wrong me," she said. "Your father made his will at my request. I need not tell you that it was not in my favour; but he made it, and though there was bitterness after he was gone, there was at least peace. I have had the pain to hear resentful words from Adèle; I know she has cruel suspicions. Pray settle this in such a way as to remove them; you have much to settle. Do you give her a life-interest, or the absolute property? Is she to have your child, even in the case of a second marriage? Or, if you do not leave Lilian to her care, to whom do you bequeath her? So much for Adèle; so much for Lilian. Of Isabella, of Anna, I do not speak. I know you do not like them."

"I shall not forget them," interrupted Mr. Osborne, with another bitter smile.

Mrs. Osborne raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I have a hundred and seventy pounds a year," she said, with dignity. "I ask, I wish for nothing—for nothing, William, but that by that one simple act, you will put an end to the unseemly contest which has begun by your sick bed, and must not desecrate this hour of trial. I knew you to be firm and courageous, like your father, and therefore I felt I could mention this matter to you."

"You did well," replied Mr. Osborne; but he said no more; he looked wearied of speech, and again closed his eyes.

The tramp of a horse on the road caught Mrs. Osborne's ear quicker than that of Jeannette. She slipped out, admitted Docteur Guillaume herself, and led him to Mr. Osborne at once.

"Lilian is pretty well," she said, "but you will find William much worse, I fear."

"I shall judge for myself," he said, drily.

"Oh! of course."

She ushered him in with the intimation, softly whispered: "Here is Docteur Guillaume, William;" and she waited, standing in the study, until Docteur Guillaume reappeared.

He looked grave.

"How is he?" she asked, anxiously.

"I shall come again this evening," was the only reply he deigned her. "You need not trouble yourself to come up with me. I know the way to the child's room."

But Mrs. Osborne, warned, perhaps, by a secret presentiment of Jeannette's intentions, could not hear of such a thing. She locked Mr. Osborne in, and accompanied Docteur Guillaume to Lilian's room. Mrs. Osborne was extremely anxious about the dear child.

"She will do well enough," shortly said Docteur Guillaume.

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course I do. You do not suppose she is ill, do you?"

"I want mamma," said Lilian, crying.

"I feel so anxious about her, poor darling," pursued Mrs. Osborne; but Docteur Guillaume was already going down stairs, and without troubling herself to answer Lilian's screaming question — "What have you done with mamma?" Mrs. Osborne followed him closely.

If her fair hand had, indeed, been only sufficiently near the poor darling just then, Lilian would have received a most significant reply; but a bird like Docteur Guillaume, with a fowler like Jeannette, were not to be neglected for the sake of any impertinence. The event justified Mrs. Osborne's foresight and prudence; Jeannette stood waiting at the door below, evidently to speak to the Doctor.

"What do you want?" asked Mrs. Osborne, stepping between her and Docteur Guillaume.

"I feel so ill!" said Jeannette, with a moan.

"What ails you?" impatiently asked Docteur Guillaume.

"She has been eating too much fruit," coolly replied Mrs. Osborne.

Jeannette, confounded at the audacity of the invention, found not a word to say.

"Take some hot broth," said Docteur Guillaume. "I shall come again this evening," he added, addressing Mrs. Osborne.

The door opened, he stepped out, mounted his horse, and rode away briskly.

The hopes of Jeannette, which had revived with his last words, died in the birth. Mrs. Osborne

closed the door, locked it and took out the key to her face.

"Are we prisoners, Madame?" resolutely asked Jeannette.

Mrs. Osborne smiled.

"You can leave the house when you like," she said; "but if you leave, you shall not enter it again. The choice is yours."

Jeannette groaned audibly, but confessed herself conquered by retreating. Mrs. Osborne returned to her post in her stepson's study.

The sun was near setting when Docteur Guillaume was again admitted by Mrs. Osborne. With mysterious and decorous gravity, she led him into the Hall, and assuming a confidential air, she said—

"And how is Adèle?"

"Very well," he drily replied; and he rose.

"No—no, you must not go. Docteur Guillaume, you are a friend of the family, you must undertake the office of a friend to Adèle. I know, poor child, she never would mention the matter to you: but first, have I your word that William shall not know I have mentioned to you the word Will?"

"I hear it for the first time," said Docteur Guillaume, mistrustfully.

"Sick men are so strange," pursued Mrs. Osborne; "he might misjudge his wife if I pleaded her cause. Have I your word that this conversation shall be strictly confidential?"

Docteur Guillaume reflected awhile, and at length he said—

"You have; but pray why speak of Will to Mon-

sieur Osborne? I do not think he is going to die, do you?"

"Heaven forbid! but every illness may take an unfavourable turn. And Adèle has nothing, whilst Lilian is very rich. Does it not seem absurd to add to her ample fortune the Manor of Courcelles and her father's moderate provision, and to leave Adèle destitute?"

"These are arguments I cannot urge," drily said Docteur Guillaume. "I may advise Monsieur Osborne to make his will; more I cannot do."

"And that will suffice," said Mrs. Osborne. "She has nothing, and he knows it."

"Pray is it at her request you speak?" asked Docteur Guillaume.

"Good Heavens, no! how can you so misunderstand me? The poor child knows and feels that she ought not to be left unprovided for; but she would die before she would speak of it in this open-hand, business-like fashion. She is seventeen, Docteur Guillaume, and I am near fifty—there is the difference."

"And you are certain she is unprovided for?"

"I am certain of it."

"I shall advise Monsieur Osborne to make his will," said Docteur Guillaume, in a tone that implied —"I shall do no more."

"That will suffice," she graciously replied, "his heart will do the rest. And now I release you."

She led him to the sick room, but she did not enter it. A low night-lamp burned on a table; its light fell on Mr. Osborne's face. Mrs. Osborne looked at him from the door. He was leaning on one elbow;

his left hand supported his flushed cheek; whilst his right, shaking with fever, wrote on a paper which rested on his pillow. He raised his eyes as the door opened; they burned with strange and unusual light; his brow was contracted, his lips were compressed; pain, mental and bodily, was written in his whole aspect: but Docteur Guillaume, by closing the door, shut out the vision. He remained alone with his patient.

"Have you seen her?" eagerly asked Mr. Osborne.

"Of course, I have."

"How is she?"

"Well, to be sure. How are you, rather?"

He felt his pulse, put a few questions, then said, abruptly—

"I speak to a man. You will not think yourself dying if I advise you to make your will?"

"Am I in danger?" asked Mr. Osborne.

"No; but danger is not the right time."

"Very true; and what sort of a will is expected from me?"

Docteur Guillaume rose and said, drily—

"Truth was never welcome yet."

"Indeed, I am very much obliged to you," said Mr. Osborne, "but I repeat it, what sort of a will is it to be? Had I not better, for instance, bequeath my property and my child to my stepmother?"

"You are jesting, sir, and I am in sober earnest," said Docteur Guillaume, gravely. "Make your will, what is it to me to whom you leave your property? Yet if you really ask my advice, I should venture to say, remember that you have a young

wife whom your death would leave unprovided for."

Mr. Osborne gave a start. How did Docteur Guillaume know that Adèle was not provided for?

"I have a child, too," he said coldly.

"Your child is rich, your wife is poor. To right one is not to wrong the other."

"My wife is very young, she might marry again."

"What if she did? You married twice," said the advocate of Adèle.

Mr. Osborne did not look offended; he said calmly,—

"I am much obliged to you for your advice. I shall remember it."

"And that Madame Osborne is unprovided for."

"I shall not forget it. But you are partial. My stepmother is poor; my sisters are portionless. You have not spoken of them, Docteur Guillaume."

"I take interest in no one save Madame Osborne," was the blunt answer.

"Right, Docteur Guillaume. Perhaps she is uneasy on this subject. Of course she has not mentioned anything of the kind to you?"

"Indeed she has not."

"Nor any friend for her?"

Docteur Guillaume coughed and pretended not to hear.

"You saw her to-day?" resumed Mr. Osborne; "did she give you any message for me?"

"Madame Osborne did not know I was coming here this evening."

There was a pause; Mr. Osborne broke it by saying,—

"Will you do me a great favour, Docteur Guillaume?"

"With pleasure, of course—of course."

"The house of Madame Gérard lies on your way home. Will you take this letter to my wife? Excuse my making you my messenger; I have my reasons."

He took from beneath his pillow the letter he was writing when Docteur Guillaume entered. It was not sealed, but merely folded. Docteur Guillaume said so curtly. Mr. Osborne smiled.

"You would not read it?" he said securely.

"I know nothing about that."

"Well, then, I do. I say you would not read it, Docteur Guillaume?"

"Your seal and some sealing-wax, if you please."

Mr. Osborne pointed to a table with a tired look; Docteur Guillaume sealed the letter, put it in his pocket, drew on his gloves, took his hat, and with a formal,—

"I have the honour to wish you a good evening," he took his leave.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. OSBORNE.

Day was declining; wild clouds swept wildly across a grey sky; the lake was dark and sullen, the mountains frowned above the road, and the road was solitary. A poet would have said that sorrow brooded over nature, all Docteur Guillaume thought was,—

"Peste! it is going to rain, and I have no umbrella."

He urged his little trotting horse; he was in a great hurry, not merely on account of the rain, but for all sorts of reasons. He had to call upon Madame Lascours and to see Mr. Osborne's wife. "And I shall be bored with questions and nerves," thought Docteur Guillaume. He had to go to Nantua and visit a lady's five sick children, "whose only complaint is gormandizing," grumbled Docteur Guillaume; and finally he had to go home and have his game of draughts with his neighbour the curé. "He has beaten me five times running," thought Docteur Guillaume, "but I have a move in my

head. Ah, ha! Monsieur le Curé," he chuckled, "we shall see to-night." Again and again Docteur Guillaume chuckled at his move, and again impatiently urged his little trotting horse.

It is not every one who has as snug a home to go to and as comfortable a housekeeper to welcome him as had Docteur Guillaume. It was a small house, warm in winter, freshened in summer by cool breezes; it had a garden full of roses, wherewith Docteur Guillaume might have bound his brows according to the precepts of his favourite Horace, had not modern fashion forbidden it; and it had, too, what Horace would have liked, and what has luckily remained the fashion of all ages, a cellar stocked with good old wine, choice, pure Burgundy—Docteur Guillaume was a patriot, and scorned Bordeaux—sweet as honey, mellow as the mellowest of fruit, Burgundy which Monsieur le Curé modestly praised as "parfait, excellent," and of which a bottle placed on a side table with a plate of cakes and raisins, enlivened the game of draughts. Who shall wonder, therefore, that Docteur Guillaume was in a hurry, and had something else to think of than Mr. Osborne and Mr. Osborne's wife?

The Curé was certainly to blame for it all; that move made him take the wrong turn, and Docteur Guillaume had trotted on half a mile before he perceived that the house of Madame Gérard had remained behind him. He felt highly provoked; it was the delay of an hour, yet, to do him justice, he did not hesitate a moment. He turned back briskly,

and in twenty minutes he had reached Madame Gérard's door.

It was still the same low house, backed by the mountain that had seemed so sad to Adèle; a grass-grown path led to the door, which stood open; Madame Lascours sat reading, and Madame Gérard sat sewing in the little parlour, which was also the best room of the house. The sound of Docteur Guillaume's horse made them both look up; Madame Lascours smiled; Madame Gérard seemed to be thinking about it.

"How is Madame Osborne?" asked Docteur Guillaume, feeling for the letter, and resolved not to alight.

"Well, I hope," replied Alice.

"I suppose you know?" shortly said Docteur Guillaume.

"No, I do not; I have not seen her for a long time."

Docteur Guillaume felt bewildered.

"Ah! bah!" he said, "I thought," but suddenly remembering that if he said a word more he should be overwhelmed with questions, and amazement, he checked himself in time, and said, "I thought you saw her often? Good evening. We shall have rain!"

He pricked his horse and rode away, before Madame Gérard had discovered that her left ear ached, and that she wanted to know what to do.

Docteur Guillaume felt bewildered at it all. He had told Mrs. Osborne that he had seen Adèle that day, because she was the sort of person he would take

a perverse pleasure in deceiving. He had averred the same thing to Mr. Osborne, because he had promised him in the morning to go and see his wife. He had forgotten that promise, but he had not the least doubt Madame Osborne was in perfect health; he would go and see her that evening; and saying he had seen her was no greater harm than setting his watch an hour too fast; besides, it was one of those medical untruths concerning which Docteur Guillaume felt no scruple. Monsieur Osborne was ill, feverish; it would help him to sleep soundly.

But now Docteur Guillaume began to feel that Monsieur le Curé was right when he averred there were no white lies—that they were all black, like their father.

"I wish I had gone there this morning," thought Docteur Guillaume, as he rode back to Courcelles. "It would have spared me a world of trouble."

He felt annoyed; he also felt perplexed. It was very strange. What was going on in that old Manor, of which Mrs. Osborne was portress? What stroke of destiny had fallen in that large, silent house, where the wife left the sick husband and his sick child to the care of a stepmother he did not appear to doat on? Where could that young wife of seventeen, who was little more than a child herself, have flown to?

Docteur Guillaume reached the Manor without having found an answer to these queries. After some slight delay, and some knocking with the butt end of his whip against the gate-like door, a man's voice growled from within,—

"Who is there?"

"Open, Imbecile."

"Who are you, I say?"

"You know me well enough; open I say."

Surly and dogged came the answer:

"Say your name or stay out."

Docteur Guillaume was in great wrath; but he had lost time enough; he could not lose more for a point of etiquette.

"My name is Docteur Guillaume," he said angrily, "come to me the next time you break your leg, you ungrateful rascal."

Bolts were withdrawn; the massive lock grated harshly; the door opened, and the low brow and dark thickset frame of Mathieu appeared under the glow of a lamp which the turnkey of Courcelles held arm high.

"Go to your mistress, sir; and ask her if this is a prison;" stammered forth Doctor Guillaume, pale with passion.

"I know what I am about," grumbled Mathieu. He shewed the Doctor in the Hall and left him there to digest at his ease the affront he had received.

It was some time before Mrs. Osborne came; at length she entered calm and courteous. She gave Docteur Guillaume, who had cooled down to temperate heat, a clear, penetrating look, but she put no questions. He had to begin.

"The fact is," he said, "it is not necessary of course that Monsieur Osborne should know it; but the fact is, that Madame Osborne——but I suppose you know where Madame Osborne is!"

"She is with her friend Madame Lascours. Did you not see her there to-day?"

"No; she is not there," said Docteur Guillaume wincing. "I have just been there with Mr. Osborne's letter, and she is not and has not been there."

Mrs. Osborne gave a start.

"You alarm me, Doctor Guillaume," she said, "where can she be? She left this morning early—I saw the carriage drive away,—Docteur Guillaume, you must be mistaken; my daughter-in-law is with her friend."

"I tell you she is not—she is somewhere else of course; but there she is not."

Mrs. Osborne sank down on a chair, and clasped her hands.

"This is dreadful," she murmured audibly, "dreadful."

"Why, what can have happened to her?" impatiently asked Docteur Guillaume.

"Ask, rather—what can she have done?" groaned Mrs. Osborne—"unhappy girl—a whole family disgraced!"

She rose, and paced the room to and fro with agitated steps.

Docteur Guillaume opened his mouth and his eyes, and drew a deep breath. He belonged to that circumscribed class of beings whom sorrow has rarely visited, whom passion has never disturbed, whom small cares and small trials surround from their birth to their grave, all else excluding. In many a tragic story, in many a sad, domestic drama, might Docteur Guillaume be an actor, and unless told so, never

know it. With difficulty he seized Mrs. Osborne's meaning; with incredulousness, he received it. It was not so much faith in Adèle, though he liked her in his way; it was the strangeness, the impossibility of so violent an infraction to the calm and happy routine of daily life, that made him reject it.

"Ah! bah!" he said, "run away from a good house and a good husband! Ah! bah!"

"Ah, Docteur Guillaume, he has been harsh, and she is passionate."

"Ah! bah! he is fond of her, and she is a good little thing. How would married people amuse themselves if they could not quarrel now and then?"

"It distracts me to think of it."

"Ah! bah!" said Docteur Guillaume, stubbornly, "I will never believe it."

"Nor will I until it is proved to me," replied Mrs. Osborne. "No, you are right; it is impossible; and yet if you knew all!—I shall send for her in every direction—now, at once."

"It will be time enough to tell Monsieur Osborne to-morrow," observed Docteur Guillaume. "The fact is," he added, a little confusedly, "the fact is, I told him I saw Madame Osborne to-day, and left her well at the house of Madame Gérard, and he gave me this letter for her, which you can send to her when you know where she is. There is no necessity," pursued Dr. Guillaume, "why I should call to-morrow; if he is worse, you can send for me."

"Good evening, Docteur Guillaume," solemnly said Mrs. Osborne, raising her handkerchief to her eyes, "you leave a stricken house."

"Ah! bah! I will never believe it—life is prose, Madame, life is prose! The little thing is gone off to some other friend's. Good evening! I think I shall call to-morrow all the same."

And Docteur Guillaume went off in a hurry that partook more of dismay than of an anxious wish to play his game of draughts with the curé.

Mrs. Osborne, too, flighty as Docteur Guillaume fancied her, thought that life was prose; but she was a woman subtle, keen, and watchful; she could understand what she could not feel, and she knew that prose can have many a deep meaning.

"Where can she be gone to? What can she be aiming at?" thought Mrs. Osborne, standing still in the Hall to meditate; and from an excess of caution, she rang, and inquired of Mathieu, who answered the summons, if he felt sure that the place was really and securely locked.

"There is a band of burglars, I hear," she added, explanatorily.

But Mathieu's reply was satisfactory. A mouse could not creep in unseen, and the bolts were strong. Mrs. Osborne was glad to hear it; the band was a desperate band; one could not be too careful. Mathieu withdrew; Mrs. Osborne took up the letter Docteur Guillaume had left. She looked at the seal, and coolly broke it, and coolly read it.

"Adèle," said Mr. Osborne to his wife, "why did you leave me without a word, written or spoken, of adieu? What have they been saying or doing to you? I will not wrong your faith in me by protestations of affection; you cannot know how much I

love you, for I cannot show it; and love is not a tale to be related; but you know I am fond of you, and you know, that if I did not esteem you, I could not love you one hour. Whatever you may hear, believe nothing; whether I live or die, believe nothing that could alienate us in life or in death; believe nothing save that I love you much, very much—that my trust in you is deep and immoveable. Let not the words 'whether I live or die,' shock you; I am in no apprehension of death; but who can reckon on a day? I could not be easy without telling you that I made my will a month ago; it is in the hands of Monsieur Ledru, Notary at Nantua. I leave all I have and love to you. Make Lilian good and true like you, and bear with her faults for my sake. I would say more but that I should grieve or alarm you, when there is no need for alarm or grief; besides, I am tired, and can write no longer. Write quickly; your letter will be to me like the sound of your voice, which I have missed this whole day."

The initials of Mr. Osborne signed this letter, and a significant postscript—"Do not trust every messenger," closed it.

Mrs. Osborne put it down, and bit her lip.

"He is just like his father," she thought, "sullen, obstinate, hesitating, irresolute; his father was decisive, it is true, but what matter; they are or were alike. I never could manage the father; and when I think I hold the son, he has slipped through my fingers."

She read the letter again; the will was a blow,

but it was not the worst. The calmness of Mr. Osborne's epistle seemed to his stepmother more ominous by far. A testament can be annihilated by another testament. Passion can be swayed to the perdition of the loved object, or Othello had never murdered Desdemona because she had lost the mystic handkerchief woven by the Egyptian. But who can prevail over obstinate love and generous faith? Who can persuade a man who will not be persuaded? Who can move one whose very love is tempered by calmness?

"I did well to wait," thought Mrs. Osborne, moodily; "I did well to wait; now is the time; we shall see what he will say to proof."

She sealed the letter with her own seal, which resembled his. "He will have something else besides the difference to think of," she wisely concluded; and with that letter in her hand, she went up to Mr. Osborne's room.

Several times in the course of the day Mr. Osborne had requested his stepmother to procure him a nurse, or, at least, to let Jeannette wait upon him. Mrs. Osborne had evaded the request with plausible pretences. An excellent nurse was coming, but never came, never having been sent for; Jeannette could not be with her master, for she was unfortunately ill in bed; and calamity, too, had befallen Jean, he had hurt his foot and could not stir; as for Marie, Lilian's bonne, she had plenty to do upstairs; and Mathieu had the whole house to attend to. In short, there was no one left in this stricken house, as Mrs. Osborne justly called it, no one who could

give Mr. Osborne a glass of water, save Mrs. Osborne herself.

The sudden and absolute solitude in which he found himself, struck Mr. Osborne as suspicious and strange, and in a voice and with a manner that expressed his feelings, he now inquired, as his stepmother entered his room, if the nurse were come, and why she was not coming.

"I shall send for her again," said Mrs. Osborne, with a sigh. "Docteur Guillaume has just called—he has left a letter for you."

She approached the bed as she spoke; there was much at stake, and Mrs. Osborne was in no sense a timid woman. She sighed again, and she repeated—

"Yes, he has left a letter for you; here it is."

With slight though visible emotion Mr. Osborne held out his hand, Mrs. Osborne hesitated.

"It is not a reply," she said, "it is your own letter. Docteur Guillaume did not see Adèle; she is not with Madame Lascours."

"Where is she gone to?" quickly asked Mr. Osborne.

Mrs. Osborne shook her head.

"No one knows."

"Pshaw!" he said impatiently; "Madame Lascours must know."

"Oh, but she has not been there at all," observed his stepmother; "she left Courcelles early this morning in a carriage, and she did not go to her friend Alice."

"Excuse me, she did; Docteur Guillaume saw her there."

"Docteur Guillaume said that to pacify and please you. It is he himself," she added, looking at him steadily, "who has given me the information I give you. Adèle has not been to Madame Lascours, to-day."

A livid pallor overspread Mr. Osborne's face.

"Good God! where is she, then?" he groaned, in strange anguish; "where is she? where can she be? Send for her everywhere, for God's sake lose no time. Where is Jean? where is Mathieu? send Jeannette here to me."

"Jean and Mathieu are both gone," replied Mrs. Osborne, with a calmness which the goddess of Truth might have envied. "I ought, perhaps, to have waited for their return to tell you, but I could not. Jeannette is too ill to come here; besides, she knows nothing."

"But where can she be?" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, with a sort of despair; "what have you been doing to her?" he added, fixing on his stepmother a keen and angry eye.

"Nothing," firmly replied Mrs. Osborne; "nothing, William, on my honour. And if, like Adèle, you suspect me in your heart of having sent the anonymous letter that has caused all this mischief, you wrong me. I am incapable, whatever you and she may think, of so cruel an act of treachery."

All the blood seemed to have forsaken Mr. Osborne's pale face. He started up from his pillow, and leaned on one elbow.

"Who has told her about that letter?" he cried; "who has dared to tell her?"

Mrs. Osborne did not answer.

"I thought myself the master of this house," continued Mr. Osborne, trembling with resentment; "I thought no one would presume to mention to my wife a matter she should never have learned save from me. I ask again, who has dared to tell her?"

"I have not opened my lips to her on the subject," coldly said Mrs. Osborne, "and do my judgment the justice of thinking that I would not commit such a blunder."

"Then it is, it must be Isabella."

"It is not; I taxed her with it, and she denied it indignantly. I need not tell you that Isabella's word is to be believed. I can even assure you that Capitaine Joseph is innocent. He gave me his word of honour that he had never mentioned the subject to Adèle."

"But who can have told her?" he angrily persisted; "who, save you three, knew it?"

There was a pause, brief but emphatic.

"Monsieur de Launay knew it too," deliberately said Mrs. Osborne.

"Well," said Mr. Osborne.

"Well," she echoed boldly, "he could write and warn her."

"He—he—do you know what you are saying?"

"I do; I say he could write to her. Would it be the first time that he has done so?"

The sting went home. The shaft was too keen not to pierce. He gnawed his lip, he grasped the sheet with convulsive hand.

"She never got that letter," he said at length;

"Monsieur de Launay is either a miserable intriguer or a miserable dupe."

"William, you are too generous, too trusting. I do not wish to make myself the accuser of that unhappy girl. I will not exaggerate her folly, for it is no more; but I say you are too generous, too trusting. I say, she has deceived you."

"Take care," he said, in a low voice, "take care."

"I know what I am saying."

"Remember of whom you speak."

"I remember it; and do you remember that Monsieur de Launay wrote more than one letter; that there were replies which have been burned, it is true, but which once existed?"

Mr. Osborne had sunk back on his pillow, he looked steadily at his stepmother.

"Once for all, drop this," he sternly said.

"I will not. I say you are too generous, too trusting. Where is Adèle? Who told her about that letter? Where is she? Why has she fled from the house where she has left her sick husband and his sick child? Why is she not where she said she would be, with the only friend she has? Where is she fled, I ask again? To whom—with whom?"

Mr. Osborne looked at her as if he would read her very soul, but he did not answer.

"Monsieur de Launay is gone to Belgium," said Mrs. Osborne. "Gone or going."

"You have overshot the mark," said Mr. Osborne, calmly, though he had never felt in a greater

passion. "You have succeeded in insulting me, and how can I resent it? You are a woman—you are my father's widow! You have, I say, succeeded in insulting me, but know, once for all, that it is puerile, that it is foolish to attempt to move me where Adèle is concerned. Modesty is in her soul, Truth on her lips, and Honour in her heart. Your accusations are not an insult to her, for her they cannot reach; but they are an insult, and a gross one, to me—to my common sense as a man, to my judgment as a husband."

"William, I pity you," said Mrs. Osborne; "but you have left me no choice, you must be convinced. I do not know, indeed, where Adèle is, and I will say no more on that subject; but I repeat it, she has deceived you cruelly and shamefully, and I will prove it."

"I defy you," said Mr. Osborne, with a smile full of scorn.

Without answering, Mrs. Osborne left the room.

"Oh, God, where is she!" he murmured, returning to that tormenting thought. "What have they been doing to her?—Where is she?"

Visions full of horror passed before him. He saw her drowning in the lake, and heard her last cry; he saw her floating on its still waters, white and dead. Agony grasped his heart like an iron hand. He tried to rise, and fell back powerless; fever and weakness, stronger than chains of adamant, bound him to his sick bed. Adèle might be dead or dying, she might, in her despair, have cast herself into the

lake; she might have fled to where he never could find her, and he was powerless to save or follow. An "Oh, God help her!" full of woe, was all that remained to him in that bitter hour—the bitterest he had ever known.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MEETING.

Docteur Guillaume left the Manor very much disturbed. He felt positively uncomfortable; but so unusual a mood could not last; he soon returned, like a good thermometer, to his natural equilibrium, and trotted on grumbling to himself. "There are some people who must always get on the stilts of life, and rant and rave. Ah, bah! life is prose from beginning to end. Prose, prose," thought Docteur Guillaume, musing. A heavy shower of rain confirmed him in this opinion.

It is raining fast. Do not tell Docteur Guillaume, who is wet, and out of temper with having been delayed by Mr. Osborne's business, and been made a postman of—do not tell him that life has very sad prose—do not talk to him of hearts which sorrow will break and wrong drive to despair. An umbrella would be infinitely more welcome than all your preaching; his game of draughts in his quiet home, with his pleasant neighbour, the curé, would be worth all your arguments.

But now the rain has ceased; the sky has cleared a little; glimmers of light pierce it; the shining of many a new-formed pool on the miry road, warns the Docteur against many a splash; he picks his way slowly and cautiously, and reaches the two cross roads where once already this evening he took the wrong turn.

"Attention!" says Docteur Guillaume, and he pauses; not that, with that move of the curé's out of his head, there was much danger of mistake. The road to Courcelles was broad, and skirted the lake; the path that crossed it was a path and no more, and it went up to the mountain.

Docteur Guillaume was not a superstitious man—at least he often said so, and who had so good a right to know as he had? But his childhood had heard and believed in strange stories. He had had cold terrors on him in passing certain spots, shudders and horrors which he still remembered now that his head was grey. The two cross roads where the suicide Pierre was buried, and the spirit of Catherine sat, had ever been to him a place of awe, and not without reason: twice, and most distinctly in the gloom of evening, he had seen Catherine sitting in her favourite haunt. He had seen her wringing her hands and making a silent moaning, that convulsed her pale face with woe, and did not pass forth in sound from her white lips. Once he had fled, and once he had fainted.

Docteur Guillaume had outgrown those childish fears; he had learned that either his sight or his digestion must have been out of order at the time of the

spectral vision ; but somehow or other he never passed by the two cross roads without a sort of twinge, and he never passed by them at night when he could possibly help it. He now reined in his little horse to take breath, he wiped his moist brow, and he said to himself, " Docteur Guillaume, you are an old fool."

Was it a reality, was it a vision that made him give that sudden start and turn sick and cold? He saw a dark figure like that of a woman standing beneath the dark tree that marked where the two roads met. It moved, it came towards him, it stood by his horse, it spoke. " Docteur Guillaume, how is he ?"

Docteur Guillaume breathed relieved; it was no ghost; it was Mr. Osborne's wife.

" Well, Madame," he said testily, " you have done a pretty thing; here am I out at this hour of the night in the rain on your account."

" Docteur Guillaume, how is he ?"

" Worse," bluntly replied Docteur Guillaume ; he had enough of not telling the truth for that evening.

" Worse ! " she moaned. " Is he very ill ?"

" Indeed he is."

" Is he in danger ?"

" He is, but we will get him out, with God's help."

She seized his hand and pressed it fervently between her own.

" And now, Madame," said Docteur Guillaume, " will you tell me, in the name of wisdom, why you are walking or running about the country instead of being with your friend ?"

"You are mistaken, Docteur Guillaume. I have not been running about the country. I have spent this sad day in the house of a poor woman; I paid her well for the use of her room; I sat by the window watching for you, Docteur Guillaume."

"Watching for me, Madame!"

"I saw you pass this evening; but it was too light, and there were men on the road; you were coming from Courcelles. I saw you pass again; but a child showed you her arm which was hurt. I knew you would return, and it would be dark then, so I stole out at dusk and waited here."

"If you had gone to the house of your friend, Madame, you would have learned quicker news of your husband, and you would have avoided some unpleasantness."

"Friend!" she cried, "I have no friend. I have but one, and he, God help me, is on a sick bed."

Docteur Guillaume could not see her, but in the silence of the night he heard her weeping.

"Well, Madame," he said, "your mind is satisfied now. We can go to Madame Lascours'. She will be in bed, I dare say, but we will waken her up, for there you must sleep."

"I will not trust her," said Adèle, in a clear, determined voice. "I will trust none, friend or foe. I thought they would make me mad this morning. I thought my heart must break. They all united to deceive me, and they nearly succeeded, for the young are credulous, passionate, and easily worked to their ruin; but God was with me, and if I sank for a mo-

ment, yet my faith in him was stronger than their malice, and now I feel what I have always felt. He is my anchor and my strength : I can lean on him and defy them all."

"But, Madame," said Docteur Guillaume, "that need not prevent you from sleeping at Madame Gérard's ?"

"I shall spend this night at the Manor of Courcelles," quietly said Adèle.

"Madame !"

"I tell you, Docteur Guillaume, that I shall not spend one night out of my husband's house."

"Ah," said Docteur Guillaume, "very well !" He added—"We are only half a league off. I shall have the pleasure of escorting you home. Can you ride behind me? The road is wet for your little feet."

The horse was low, and Adèle was agile ; she stepped up on a stone ; in a second she was behind him. Docteur Guillaume turned his horse's head, and moaned internally—"I shall not get home to-night."

They rode on for a little while in silence, then the soft, childish voice of Adèle spoke sweetly in the old Doctor's ear—

"Docteur Guillaume, you know I have always liked you very much ; you have always been so kind to me ; you are like a father to me, indeed you are ; but after your goodness and your kindness to-night, I will like you a great deal more."

"I am only doing my duty," roughly said Docteur Guillaume ; "you owe me no thanks ; I would

much rather be at home than here. Do you know how often I have trotted up and down this road to-day, Madame?—something like six or seven times."

"Dear, good, kind Docteur Guillaume, I shall never forget it. I shall pray for you night and morning. I shall remember you till I die."

Docteur Guillaume reined in his horse, which at once stood still, and said, irefully—

"Madame, you are a coaxing little Syren; but the Goddess of Beauty herself, with her zone around her waist, could not make Docteur Guillaume do what you want him to do. Besides, I am not quite such a simpleton as to forget the past. I remember those leeches six years ago, and all the love and the kisses I was to get for not applying them, and how when I claimed my reward I was laughed at for my pains."

"It was because you confessed you had cheated me, Docteur Guillaume. I did not want the leeches; you know I did not; did I now?"

"Never mind. The lady would do like the little girl, much she would care for Docteur Guillaume when she had got what she wanted out of him. Besides, I will not do it," he added, stubbornly.

"Oh, yes, you will—you will," she pleaded.

"Never, Madame! I take you to the house because I cannot prevent your going there, and you cannot be prevented either from entering your own dwelling; but help you to see him, smuggle you into his room—never, Madame, never! It is bad enough to take you to a place where two persons are ill of a pestilential disease."

"Two! Why who else is ill?" she asked.

"Mademoiselle Lilian; but she is doing well; it is nothing."

Adèle clapped her hands with a sort of despair.

"Ah!" she cried, "what will he think of me?—what will he think of me? I must see him, Docteur Guillaume; he might die; oh, what would become of me then?—what would become of me?"

"Monsieur Osborne will not die; but I have done my duty; I have advised him to make his will, and I have reminded him that his wife—"

"I shall certainly go mad!" interrupted Adèle; "you dared to speak of a will to him—to talk to him of me! Are you, too, my enemy? Ah, it was she told you—it was she! Oh, God help me! God deliver me!"

She moaned with strange anguish. When she spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"Docteur Guillaume, I neither coax nor pray now; I adjure you, I desire you to help me to see my husband to-night. On my head be the peril of the act, or on yours the sin of the refusal."

"I take the sin then," said Docteur Guillaume, stoutly. "Pray what makes you so anxious to see your husband to-night, Madame?"

"Right, I should have told you; you will yield when you know. Docteur Guillaume, I have been cruelly slandered to him. I know he does not believe it; but it must cut him to the very heart. I must see him; I must let him feel and know, in his very heart too, that I never cared for any one but for him. I must deliver him from the hands of those tormentors who could waylay his sick bed with such

accusations, who could make you haunt him with the spectre of a will. I tell you I must see him; you see it now yourself, do you not?"

Docteur Guillaume was disturbed. He had never liked Mrs. Osborne; he mistrusted her in his heart; he liked Adèle, and had faith in her. He began to believe that she had undergone some strange wrong, that some strange scheme to hem in the sick man, and conquer him perhaps in a weak hour, was afloat.

"Madame," he said, "I am concerned at this; write to your husband; justify yourself; I will bear the letter."

"No—no, letters are cold and lifeless; they have no looks, no voice, no love in their very aspect," said Adèle, passionately. "He must see and feel me. One look, one touch of the hand, will justify me without a word. I must see him."

"Never through me," firmly said Doctor Guillaume.

Adèle laughed; he could not see her face, the night was too dark, but that laugh, sweet and girlish, though defiant, brought her careless aspect vividly before him.

"I will baffle you all," she said. "I will go to Lilian's room and take her away; and if I cannot see him, why Lilian shall sleep in my arms tonight."

"There never was a creature so perverse," indignantly cried Docteur Guillaume; "however, I am forearmed, and shall give due warning to Madame Osborne."

"She cannot watch two rooms at once. She is too subtle for me, and I am too subtle for Jeannette, and for you too, Docteur Guillaume."

"Very likely, Madame; very likely. Nevertheless, I shall do my best. We shall reach Courcelles in something like another quarter of an hour, and we shall see—we shall see, Madame, if you will baffle old Docteur Guillaume."

She did not reply—she spoke no more, save to say once languidly:

"Docteur Guillaume, pray ride slowly; this is very fatiguing."

"I dare say it is. The road is stony, and not particularly good. Six times, nay, seven, have I trotted up and down this road to-day, Madame."

He rode, nevertheless, as slowly and as softly too as Adéle could wish, daintily picking his way through soft muddy places. "Poor little thing!" he thought, 'how could they have the heart to torment her. So young, so pretty, so fond of him! No wonder she turns him round her finger! Ah! Docteur Guillaume, you are an old bachelor; but you need not have been—you need not. You too could have had a pretty face at home, you too could have had a little fond heart to adore you, a tender little creature to protect and to love. Why did you not, Docteur Guillaume, why did you not? You were too wise too clever, and now you are alone. The young wives of other men ride behind you and think no more of you than of an old tree, withered and bare. They coax you, they wheedle you, and they laugh at you. People say, Docteur Guillaume is privileged. But

you know what it means. It means that you are nothing and no one, Docteur Guillaume."

The night was dark, but even on its darkness there rose a massive gloom. It was the Manor: the shutters were all closed; and not one star-like light from candle or lamp broke on its sombre facade.

"Here we are," said Docteur Guillaume to his companion; "can you——"

He paused in the question; the horse bore but one rider: Adèle was gone. Softly and noiselessly she had slipped away whilst Docteur Guillaume was riding slowly. She had told him so; she was too subtle for him.

At first Docteur Guillaume was astounded, then he rallied indignantly, and roused the whole house with his knocking. Both Mathieu and his mistress came hurrying on, alarmed. Mrs. Osborne felt secretly convinced it was Adéle, and breathed relieved on seeing Docteur Guillaume alone. In broken and burning speech he told her all that he wished her to know.

"Madame, it is my duty to warn you, your daughter-in-law, who is the most perfidious little thing, is resolved to see Monsieur Osborne to-night or—so she says—to sleep with Mademoiselle Lilian, and take the small-pox.—I warn you—lock every door; capture her if you can, and lock her up; don't mind her if she prays or coaxes. She would wheedle you out of your senses. Good night, I have no more to say, take care."

"Then you have seen her?" said Mrs. Osborne eagerly.

"Yes, yes, good night. She will be here presently, I have no doubt of it."

"Stop! stop! what did she say?" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, anxiously. But vainly her hand was stretched forth, Docteur Guillaume was gone; he was riding along the road.

Mathieu locked the door; Mrs. Osborne gave him a stern look.

"Have you let her in?" she asked; "where is she hiding?"

"Madame has promised me five hundred francs," said Mathieu, doggedly; "if Madame finds that I have let in a cat, let her not give me a sou."

He handed her the key of the door as he spoke. She took it; she took also the lamp which he held and went over the whole house. Everything was safe. Mrs. Osborne felt calmer when this survey was over; and turning to Mathieu, who had followed her, she said quietly—

"If Madame Osborne should come to-night, waken me—I will let her in myself. This is her house—she has a right to enter it. All I want is, that she should not take that dreadful disease by going near my son. You understand."

"Yes, yes—I understand," said Mathieu, sneering.

"It is a hard case to have to do with such low agents," muttered Mrs. Osborne.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

Hours had worn away.

Dark was the night, moonless and starless. Low clouds stole down the mountains, and dropped a shower now and then, but though they melted away they did not leave the sky more clear; it remained black and threatening.

Jeannette sat spinning in her low stone room; on the table near her burned a little brass lamp; its light was shed on Jeannette's solitary figure, and left the cold, bare room in comparative gloom. Anxious and troubled was Jeannette's face.

"Why did my thread break five times to-night?" she muttered half aloud. "I have noticed it, when my thread breaks, there is trouble coming. Do not tell me there is nothing in a spinner's thread. What strange story was that my young master told me once about the three women who sit alone and spin the lives of women and men? There is one who spins, there is one who holds the thread, there is another who clips it; yes, that is it. He drew her for me, and

he gave her a long nose, but she had her revenge; poor fellow! the old witch clipped his thread short for him. Ah! why does she let mine spin out so long, so fine, so weak, to seventy woful years and more? Better be cut off in our strength like him than linger to sad and solitary age, and look on at the same sad stories again and again. Broken once more—God save us! what is going to happen this night? If it breaks seven times it is a death. I shall not trust it."

Jeannette pushed away her wheel with secret dismay, then jumped on her chair and uttered a scream of terror: she had seen a white face with glittering eyes looking in at her through the glass panes of the window. Rapidly she made the sign of the cross, and shut her eyes tight and remained immoveable on her chair; but a hand tapped at the window and a voice said,—

"Let me in, Jeannette."

"It is his voice," she murmured; "I have not heard it for forty years, but it is his pretty, light, cheerful voice. He is come to call me, his old servant woman. Thank God, it was for me the thread broke."

"Jeannette! Jeannette! let me in!" said the voice; "do you not know me? I am Adèle, I am your mistress; let me in, it is raining fast."

The voice sounded so life-like that Jeannette opened her eyes with a start; the face at the window, though deadly pale, was so like that of Adéle, that the old woman, though more frightened at the living apparition than she had been at the supposed spirit,

ran and opened at once. Adèle entered the room without speaking. Her face was white and rigid; her brow was contracted, her eyes were fixed and glittering, her clothes were wet with rain, her dripping hair clung to her colourless cheeks.

"Madame! Madame!" exclaimed Jeannette, but she could say no more.

"Yes, I am come back," said Adèle; "did you think that, unless in a moment of passion and woe, I could mean to leave him? No, no, I am come back, and this time I defy her and you to prevent me from seeing him. I thought to steal in to him unseen, to win by art what was denied to right; for two hours I have been watching in the rain around the house; but Fortune was against me, and I have been compelled to come in here to you. I know that you will try to be my enemy now as you were this morning, but I tell you, Jeannette, that if no other means avail me, I shall take desperate means. Give me the key, or I shall do something that will make you rue, to your dying day, ever having denied it to me."

Jeannette groaned.

"Madame, be calm, I entreat you. Good heavens! you are all wet——"

"The key," interrupted Adèle.

"And what use is it of, Madame? The doors are all locked and bolted; the key might as well be in the lake as in my pocket."

"The doors may be all locked and bolted," said Adèle, "and yet I shall see him to-night. Do you think it was through the door that I got here?"

"In the name of heaven, Madame, how did you

get in?" asked Jeannette, for the first time struck with this circumstance.

Adèle laughed with dreary triumph.

"What matter," she replied, "I got in; I am here, and I shall see my husband to-night."

The wildness of her looks, of her short, broken tones alarmed Jeannette. She seized the hands of her mistress, and said, with tears in her eyes:—

"Ah, Madame! for the love of all the saints, be calm. Sit here with me, dry your poor wet clothes, you do not know that woman, nor what she has been doing; the doors are all locked, your room——"

"The key—give me the key," imperatively said Adèle, withdrawing her hands from Jeannette's grasp.

"There it is," said Jeannette, taking it from her pocket and laying it on the table; "but I repeat it, it is useless to you; all the doors are locked, and she has the keys of them all."

Without replying, Adèle seized the key and left the room by a door that led through a narrow and dark corridor to the interior of the house; but she soon came back.

"I cannot open the door," she said; "it is hard —try it you."

"Hard!" cried Jeannette, with a jump; "the door hard! Ah, Madame, that serpent has locked me in!"

She seized the lamp and ran to the door; the key was gone, the lock was fast. Jeannette might walk in the garden as long as she pleased, but could not take one step in the interior of the house. Bursting with impotent rage she returned to the room where she had left Adèle.

"Locked in," she cried, "locked in at my age! There never was anything like it. That was why she stood and looked at me at the foot of the staircase when I came in here. Oh, the serpent! the serpent!"

She put down her lamp, threw herself indignantly on a chair and, looking around her saw that Adèle was gone. Jeannette slapped her forehead distractedly.

"She will get in to him through the window and break her neck," she cried.

She ran out into the garden.

"Madame! Madame!" she called.

Vain cry; the night was dark and silent, no voice answered her.

A fine chill rain was falling, but Adèle ran through the gloomy garden with the speed of one to whom every turning was familiar, and to whom the darkness of the night was no obstacle. The house was silent and black as if death had already entered it. One bright spot alone broke on its gloom, it was the light that burned in Mr. Osborne's study. To that study a flight of steps led. Adèle lightly ascended them, and stealthily looked in. Mrs. Osborne sat by the table; the clear bright light of a lamp shone on her calm face. She was reading a letter with marked attention; at length she rose; she went to Mr. Osborne's door, but the entrance of her trusted Mathieu made her look round. Mrs. Osborne laid her finger on her lips and went up to him; he whispered something; she looked anxious; then softly and noiselessly locking the door of her stepson's room, she withdrew the key and left the study.

Adèle had watched all. "Ay, lock," she thought, "I shall get in for all that."

She stepped up on the stone balustrade that enclosed the narrow terrace; a sculptured ledge that ran along the wall connected it with the windows of the adjoining rooms. It was narrow enough for peril to the timid, broad enough for safety to the fearless. Adèle feared neither the darkness above, nor that below; one thought had placed her beyond all dread. Steadily she took five or six steps in the gloom; she reached a window; the sky had cleared a little; a faint light glittered on glass panes. Adèle broke one; the shattered fragments fell on the floor within; she passed in her hand, opened the window, and leaped in. She ran to the door, with an instinct that led her unerringly through the darkness. She felt for the lock, put in the key;—she opened it—she stood in her husband's room.

A night lamp burned faintly on a table; the bed was shrouded in its heavy curtains; he had not heard her; she approached softly; a moan of pain guided her to his pillow. Broken words, half of anguish, half of sorrow, were on his lips; she heard her name.

"Adèle, my little Adèle!"

She knelt down on the floor by him; she passed her arms around him; she laid her lips on his cheek. She had not time to speak; he knew her at once. He pressed her to his heart with troubled joy; he embraced her with passionate fondness, and trembled, unable to utter a word. Adèle, too, trembled.

"Ah, I have suffered," she said, "but I am here now; I can defy anything."

"Thank God you are safe!" he cried at length. "Where have you been?—what have they done to you? Say nothing—you are safe—it is all right."

"Oh, yes," thought Adèle, "it is all right;" but she said nothing; a sort of calmness, of silence, of repose, fell upon her. She was conscious but of one thing—she was with her husband; his voice, his welcome had the old fondness; her head was on his pillow; her two hands were clasped in his;—this was, after what she had suffered, the one point of existence around which all else might move unheeded.

"Thank God!" he said again and again; then suddenly he turned away from her; with a sort of horror he dropped her hands; deadly to her might be that fond clasp.

"Ah, I had forgotten!" he cried; "leave me; what brings you here?—leave me!"

But vainly he tried to put her away; her arms were a chain he could not break; the face he tried to shun reposed, spite all his resistance, near his. He was too weak to prevail; he yielded; but he said again—

"What have you done?—what are you doing?"

"If you were to die this moment," she said, passionately, "and I the next, I should still bless God, and say—I am happy."

He saw and felt how useless was all opposition.

"Be it so," he said; "stay here with me; you have been to me the gift of God; I trust you to God's mercy."

"I knew you believed nothing against me," she said; "I knew it; I did for a moment think they had prevailed, but my heart soon told me—'do not believe

them; they want to divide you from him, to make you rush into some desperate folly. Do not believe them; he loves you dearly; he never would condemn you unheard; never would he banish you from his home and his heart. Let them have their way! Ah, she did not know when she looked after me from the window this morning, she did not know that I was resolved to be with you this very night. And here I am—here I am—I have baffled them all—every one."

She laughed a little wildly; he half started up; he raised the curtain; the light fell on her pale face; a singular smile played on her lips; her eyes had a fitful light.

He sank back with a dread so terrible that it overwhelmed him; forgetting all fears in one, he clasped her in his arms with a shudder full of woe.

"Ah, Adèle," he cried, "what is this? what have you been doing? why is your hair wet and dishevelled? why are your garments torn? why is there blood on your hand?"

She laughed again, and the wild aspect that had terrified him faded away into the old mischievous smile.

"I am wet, because it is raining," she said, gaily; "my clothes are torn, because I crept in through a hedge; and I cut my hand, because Madame Osborne has locked you in, and I had to get in at you through the window."

"Ah, what will not love do?" said Mr. Osborne, with a sigh; "what will not love do?"

"Hush! you are speaking too much; sleep."

She laid her finger on his lips. He smiled, and closed his eyes, more from the light that pained him

than to sleep really. Adèle leaned her elbow on his pillow, and resting her cheek on her hand, she looked down at him, and thought—

"All is over. Oh, God, all good, all merciful, I bless Thee! In a few days he must, he will be well —all is over."

A slight sound made her raise her eyes: Mrs. Osborne stood on the other side of the bed with a paper in her hand; she looked at her stepson, at his wife, and she trembled from head to foot with resentment. She was defeated and conquered; the enemy had reached the heart of the citadel. Adèle raised her forefinger, and smiled.

"Hush!" she said, in a whisper, "he is sleeping." That was her revenge.

The blue eyes of Mrs. Osborne flashed fire; anger passed over that cold face which emotion so rarely stirred; her lip turned white, and quivered, but she had not time to speak. Mr. Osborne opened his eyes, turned round, and looked at her calmly.

"Excuse me for intruding upon you," said Mrs. Osborne, with an unnatural laugh, "but I heard voices talking, and I felt too much surprised and alarmed to knock. Do you remember, William, the promise I made you a few hours ago?"

"I remember it," he said.

"You defied me to give you proofs?"

"And I do still!" he replied, indignantly.

She threw the paper which she held on his bed, and looked down at him with a smile of mingled triumph and scorn. For Mrs. Osborne was a careful woman: she had saved a letter from the burning.

Mr. Osborne looked attentively at the letter, folded it up, and gave it to Adèle, with the request—

"Put that away carefully, child.—I am very much obliged to you," he added, turning to Mrs. Osborne, "for having brought me that letter. It is, as I thought, an impudent forgery; but it will suffice to convince Monsieur de Launay that he has been a miserable dupe, and that is enough."

"You talk too much," said Adèle, chidingly; "sleep, I say."

Mrs. Osborne looked at them both, and the blood rushed up red and burning to her brow.

"William," she said, passionately, "I shall never forgive you."

She turned on her heel, left the room without waiting for a reply, and slammed the door after her with a violence worthy of Isabella.

The next morning she was gone. Thus ended in bitter and shameful defeat this insolent attempt to replace by a detested stepmother, a wife young, beautiful, and fondly loved. An attempt so insolent that if insolence were not the very nature of ambition; if it were not by insolence that men prevail over other men, far more than by talent, genius, courage of heart or nobleness of mind, it might well seem incredible.

With a start, Adèle, who sat by Mr. Osborne's bed, heard the carriage that bore away her enemy roll along the road. She looked at her husband—he had heard nothing; he was sleeping calmly, with his face turned to her.

Who shall blame her if she exulted in that hour? Who shall blame her if she rejoiced that his bitter task, that his woful trust were over! Who shall

blame her if, triumphant and glad, she thought, "In a few days he shall be well again; in a few days we shall enjoy our beautiful, our pleasant home in happy solitude. No jealous heart, no evil eye, no enemy, no friend shall come between us—Courcelles shall be our heavenly elysium, our terrestrial paradise."

Fond dreamer! Elysium was a fable; the angel's flaming sword guards Eden until the judgment day; mortal foot shall tread no more those verdant paths; mortal lips shall breathe no more that celestial air! Did she not see that worn and haggard face, did not the heavy breathing, the contracted brow, tell her their menacing story? they did not. Hope laid her hand on her eyes and blinded her; Love poured a tale in her ear that excluded every other recital. She saw, she guessed nothing; and when the truth came, it crushed her.

Without knock, without warning, Mathieu entered the room; he went up to his master's wife; he placed a bunch of keys on the table near her; he laid a letter by them, and silent and sullen as he had entered, he departed.

Adèle broke the seal and read:—

"I have desired Mathieu to give you some of the keys; Jean has the rest. You will oblige me by letting me know if you found everything right; you can direct to Madame Osborne, Poste Restante, Paris. I trust you will write at your earliest convenience. My sense of duty will not let me leave Courcelles without giving you two warnings, of which you may make such use as you please.

"Mathieu is dishonest; he stole a diamond ring from me this morning. It is not the small pox which

Mr. Osborne has, but typhus. He has not told me so, perhaps he does not know it; but *Docteur Guillaume cannot deny it.*"

The letter dropped from the hand of Adèle; she looked at her husband with silent despair. He was still sleeping; heavy, passive were his slumbers. The lover-like solitude, the happy hours in house and garden, vanished in darkness. Adèle saw nothing now, nothing but a sick bed; she watched on one side, and on the other she saw death calmly biding his hour. Truly Mrs. Osborne had not gone without her revenge.

Dull daylight filled the room, but the night lamp still burned, and Mr. Osborne still slept, when, ushered by Jean, Docteur Guillaume entered. Adèle was kneeling by the bed of her husband, with her head sunk on it; she raised her face on hearing him; its pale, mute woe silenced the reproaches on Docteur Guillaume's lips.

"Come, come," he said softly, "he will get better."

He saw she knew all.

"He awoke once last night," she replied, "and he did not know me. He called me by his stepmother's name, and he defied me to prevail; he dared me to utter the name of his wife with censure or reproach. Docteur Guillaume, they have killed him."

Docteur Guillaume never tolerated exaggeration.

"They may have taken away a chance from life," he said, "but that is not killing. I am sorry he is delirious so soon, though."

She was still kneeling; she turned her face to

him with a sort of quiet awe: underneath her breath, she asked,—

"Do you think he will die?"

"I hope not—I trust not."

Even he could say no more.

"Come, come," he again said, very softly, "we will do our best, and you must trust in God."

"I must—I must," she said, with something like despair.

Ay, you must, indeed! The hour of trial has come; the hour when man is weak or betrays; when God alone is true and strong.

The word "trust" caught Mr. Osborne's ear as he slowly wakened. He gave them both a look that knew them not.

"Poor things!" he said; "have you, too, got anything in trust?—then I pity you—I pity you."

Adèle rose calm and collected.

"Docteur Guillaume," she said, "forget that I am his wife; tell me what I am to do; treat me like a nurse in an hospital. Do not mind my feelings—I have none—save to obey you, and, with God's will, to save him."

"Come, now, I call that sensible," said Docteur Guillaume, approvingly, "and if you will be cool and self-possessed, why you will give back that chance to life of which they basely robbed him."

Did Docteur Guillaume believe that?—we know not; but his words were as magic. She drew in her breath, she nerved her breaking heart, and she vowed, come what would, to suffer and to bear.

THE CLOSE.

Bitter are those hours of trial and suspense; bitter in daily life; then let even their faint image uselessly darken no page; Providence answered the prayer; the trust was not rejected; the boon was granted, and after much sorrow, after dread and heart-sinking, came peace: Mr. Osborne recovered. He might have died—he lived; the disease which had spared him might have struck her down, the wearied watcher; it did not. She, too, was dealt with very tenderly; there remained the memory of a great dread; of days when the sun shone to mock her misery, when nature smiled on all her woe; when nights were haunted with spectres, and on all this followed a sudden hour of delight, tumultuous in its joy; then a calm, divine peace.

We have little to explain or to tell. Capitaine Joseph, who has recovered his panic, will never have to decide which of the three Mesdemoiselles Mazois he is to marry. They were all married on the same morning, a month ago, at Nantua; the presentiment

of Madame Mazois was fulfilled in a very remarkable manner; Madame de Launay died suddenly whilst Mr. Osborne was ill; the subtle, unquiet schemer is at rest. Monsieur Morel was never heard of; Jeannette maintains to this day that it was he who set fire to the Manor; Mr. Osborne thinks it was Marie reading. Of one fact there can be no doubt; it was Monsieur Morel who sent the letter, and who, under the name of Adèle, had kept up a tender correspondence with Monsieur de Launay. How he could succeed in making that gentleman his dupe, for what purpose he did do so, whether he extorted money as the price of his silence, or was satisfied with using his power in business matters, are questions which no one, save Monsieur de Launay, could answer, and on which he has chosen to remain profoundly silent. A cold and guarded letter of regret he has, indeed, written to Mr. Osborne, but there correspondence has ceased between them. Part of the truth Mr. Osborne knows, and part he conjectures; but there is one point which his imagination has never embraced, and with which his credence shall never be taxed. He already thinks it insolent enough that Monsieur de Launay should have presumed to think of Adèle, even when deluded with imaginary encouragement; he shall never know that Monsieur Morel's presumption went much farther.

"One need not tell everything, Monsieur Jean," says Jeannette to her ancient admirer, who thinks that Mademoiselle Jeannette is both wise and discreet, and approves unconditionally. Both the old servants are thoroughly happy: Mademoiselle de

Janson has been heard of; she is coming to the Manor to make sure that the forge is really silent, —but this is a secret. Lilian, we need scarcely say, recovered rapidly; she is now running in the broad alley of the garden, whilst Mr. Osborne and his wife sit quietly in one of the arbours. He is reading to her the following letter; he has just received it. It is dated Paris, Hotel Mirecour. Mrs. Osborne is the writer:

"Sir,—

"I have this morning received a letter from you which has, I confess it, surprised me.

"You offer me and my daughters a settlement; in plain speech, we are to live somewhere at your expense, and be held a burthen on your means.

"You surprise me; I must recapitulate some facts, I must refresh your memory.

"A year ago your father chose to make you his heir; he left you a vast business, a magnificent connection in trust; he bequeathed his widow and her three children to your care also in trust; where much has been given, much will be required.

"How have you repaid that confidence?—how fulfilled that trust? The business which, in his lifetime, yielded a magnificent income, has perished in your hands. Strange to say, you have even been a loser; your private income has suffered; a splendid inheritance, which would enrich most men, impoverishes you. Strange, I repeat it.

"That is not all.

"How have you dealt with your brother, with

your sisters, with me? I will tell you briefly, for the subject is not one on which your father's widow likes to dwell; you have belied him, you have wronged them, you have insulted me; you now add to that insult by your offer as impertinently worded as it is impertinently meant.

"Sir, I thank you. I am now residing with my daughter, Madame la Baronne de Launay; in her husband I have found a devoted and respectful son; and Anna and Robert, who are with me, have, in him, I feel and know, what they never had in *you—a brother.*

"Your inquiry concerning Capitaine Joseph I cannot answer. He has ceased to be my son. He is your friend and the friend of your wife, of whom I wish to say nothing. She has injured me deeply; I forgive her.

"I have the honour, Sir,

"To subscribe myself, yours obediently,

"ISABELLA OSBORNE."

Mr. Osborne folded up this letter, and said with a smile: "Poor de Launay! he has got my inheritance. We can forgive him, Adèle, can we not?"

"What a strange woman Madame Osborne must be," said Adèle.

"Aye, very strange indeed: she has some good qualities, of which she makes the most: she shows them so much that people get tired of them; I did at last. Her bad and dangerous gifts she keeps out of sight, like poisons in a druggist's shop—she knows they are not pleasant to look at; that they suggest ugly thoughts; she hides them well; who can blame

her? Now and then, indeed, she uses them, but always with a careful and sparing hand; for she knows they are deadly."

Adèle looked up at her husband. "How calmly you take it," she said.

"And how should I take it then?" he asked smiling. "Child, an insulting and insolent letter is nothing. It went hard with me indeed a year ago, when a hand I could not resist laid on me this most wearisome task, this bitter burden, this torment of toiling for and striving against a family I could not love. God has removed it all from me; that presence which I could not endure, and which, therefore, I bore with sullen patience, has left me, and for ever. When I waken in the morning I say 'It is over;' when I fall asleep at night, I say 'It is over—'"

"And I have got a wife," added Adèle, "and that is not over, and never shall be."

She spoke with happy triumph. He had emerged a free man from the shackles of his trust, and through his bondage she had won him, even as he had found her; well might they now both smile; they had conquered adverse Fate.

Happy are they whose lives yield that beautiful lesson: we cannot seek good in vain. One particular good indeed we may fail to reach, but only to win a greater, unthought of and unsought.

When Saul went forth in the desert to seek his father's strayed asses, he found not them, but instead a kingdom. The trust Mr. Osborne had accepted he could not fulfil. He had not redeemed the falling

house from ruin; he had not guided with steady hand a rebellious family; he had not reconciled heterogeneous elements. Loss, strife, discord, had been his lot; but the blessing which falls on the willing heart, on the sacrifice of inclination to duty, had not been withheld. The bequest of his father had made him meet Adèle, the dishonesty of his brother had given him his wife, the very perversity of his family had bound her to him more closely, more tenderly than his own love and indulgence. A prophet once went forth to pronounce a curse, and his tongue could only utter a blessing: all toil, all evil had turned into good for William Osborne.

A strange sweetness, a strange repose have now fallen on his life. It is as if some good genius had removed every anxious care from his brain, every sad thought from his heart. He has no wish to fulfil. Fate can deny him the accomplishment of no desire. He feels in a state of great calmness, in a mood of rest which so seldom falls to the lot of man, that when it comes we may well hold it as all but divine; as a foretaste on earth of the mingled bliss and repose of Heaven. Nothing in Adèle distracts that happy quietude. She is ardent, but once satisfied that she is beloved, she cannot be exacting. The sun is glad to shine, and she is glad to live and love without caring why or how.

Alice, too, is happy, though differently; one hopes, the other rests.

The sky has not a cloud; the lake is as calm as the sky; the mountains have a sunny look; pleasant is the old garden and flourishing as in its prime.

Lilian is laughing behind the boxwood hedge, and William Osborne and his wife are sitting side by side in one of the many arbours.

When life flows so sweetly, when change cannot trouble, when sorrow has fled—the tale is told.

THE END.

J. Billing, Printer, 103, Hatton Garden, London, and Guildford, Surrey.

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